FILLING HIS OWN SHOES

by

HENRY C. ROWLAND

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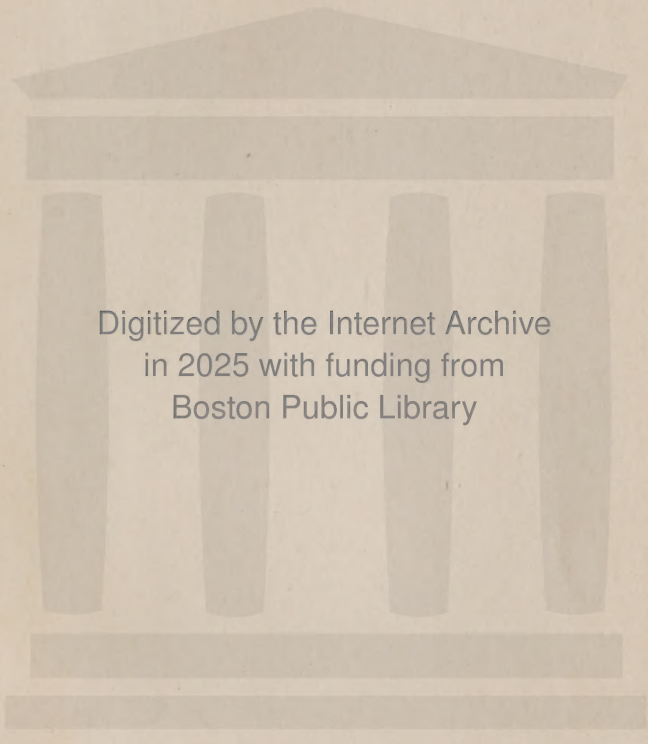
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RUGGLES AND DARTHEA

FILLING HIS OWN SHOES

BY

HENRY C. ROWLAND

With Illustrations by
George Ellis Wolfe

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FILLING HIS OWN SHOES

CHAPTER I

THE piercing notes of the porcelain-mender's pipe shrilled out from down the street, and Ruggles stretched, yawned, and ran his fingers through his mop of yellow hair, with the disagreeable duty sense of a sleepy soldier on hearing the first echoes of the reveille.

The vendor of water-cress had passed twenty minutes before, and his melodious howl, which said so many different things to different ears along the narrow, tortuous street had drowsily prepared Ruggles for his own particular summons. No need for alarm clocks in Paris! On working days, the chair-mender announced the dreary fact that it was time to rise and shine; on Sundays Ruggles usually waited for the cress-seller; but on holidays for the spending of which he had made no especial plans he was wont to repose himself up to the advent of the porcelain-man and his pipe.

Now, as he sat up in bed and observed the square patch of vivid blue sky through his wide-opened mansard window, he was inclined to regret his sloth. It was a fête-day, and the weather perfect, so far as he could see for the impeding roofs. The heavy

clouds of the evening before had been urged away by the "little north wind" so dear to the hearts of French picnickers, and the sun was softly brilliant. Ruggles sprang from his bed and, going to the window, filled his lungs with the sweet spring air.

"Some day — !" said he to himself. "Me for the road. I'll get on the wheel and pike off up the Marne. It must be fine up there, now."

He pulled a round tin bathtub from under the bed, and kicked it to the open window, peeled off his pajamas, and, filling a big bath-sponge, proceeded to stimulate his circulation to the accompaniment of song, for the water was so cold as to induce vocalism. Thus at his ablutions, Ruggles would have pleased Praxiteles or Michelangelo, who might have immortalized the youthful symmetry of his well-knit figure in a Hermes or son of Laocoön.

Of medium height and physical proportions in perfect accord with his twenty-three years, Ruggles could have posed to the credit of any young demigod. His face, too, was in keeping with his body, with its clear, well-spaced blue eyes, short, straight nose, mirthful mouth, and resolute chin. He was a handsome youngster, not only in feature, but in expression, and with his wavy yellow hair, which showed copper tones in certain lights, had put romantic ideas in the pretty head of many a *midinette* who happened to pass him on the boulevards.

But Ruggles had no answering eye for *midinettes*.

His allegiance had been early given to one whose various portraits, cut from different illustrated papers, comprised the sole decoration of the bare walls of his little mansard room. Ruggles had never seen the original of these, nor was his adoration more than that of the liege subject for his princess. But the remote ideal had so far triumphed over the present real as to have made Ruggles indifferent to such charms as were offered in comparison to those of his ivory-towered goddess.

He finished his birdlike bath and proceeded to dress for his holiday on the road. His costume was simple, but effective — a loose-fitting bicycle suit of light-gray worsted, the coat unlined and of a Norfolk cut, with stockings to match and gray buckskin shoes lacing from the toes. Fully equipped, he had the appearance of an English or American undergraduate off for a Continental holiday. He spoke good colloquial French, which added to the impression that he was a young fellow who had enjoyed educational advantages.

Three or four hours later found Ruggles pedaling blithely along the towpath of the pretty Marne. The day was perfect. The forested hillsides glowed with the delicate purple of mounting sap beneath a billowy, greenish cloud of tender infant foliage, while the lush pastures were smeared with the golden yellow of primrose, wild mustard, and dandelion. The soft air was sweet with Mother Nature's baby perfumes.

Riding cheerily on, Ruggles lent his mind to romantic fancies inspired by his surroundings.

It was five hundred years ago, and he, a knight in shining armor, was ambling down the bank of that twisting stream astride a great charger with arched neck and blood-red nostrils. Then down from the wooded slopes, to dispute his passage came a grim, mailed figure with black, waving plumes and visor closed, to wait like some equestrian figure wrought in iron, silent and sinister, the bright sun shimmering on his burnished helmet and emblazoned shield. Ruggles recognized him at once from his device — le Sieur Morgaunt de la Marne, a robber baron of ill repute, a pillager and ravisher, in the dungeons of whose castle back there in the forest languished many a wretched victim, of whom perchance the wife or daughter or sister served as a handmaiden in Morgaunt's gloomy lair.

There could be no parley with such a miscreant. Ruggles's mailed hand rose to his visor, — he gripped at the visor of his bicycling cap, where was pinned the insignia of "Le Touring Club de France," to be a member of which costs five francs a year and protects one on the road throughout France, — his lance was laid at rest. "Have at you, Sir Robber!" The hoofs of his great war-horse ground in the shale as, scenting the fray, it sprang forward with a snort of eagerness. Ruggles lowered his head and began to pedal furiously. The next instant he spun beneath an arched bridge and around a bend,

where he pitched upon a tableau which went far to dampen his knightly ardor.

Standing with her back to an easel was a slender girl with a pallid face, a palette hanging from her thumb, and her finger closed upon a paint-brush. Before her stood two lusty vagabonds in baggy corduroy trousers caught about their waists by soiled sashes of red flannel and with stout cudgels in their thick, grimy paws. The group was on the edge of a steep bank which dropped almost precipitously for ten feet into the dark-green, eddying water. It looked as if the girl had backed away and the tramps had followed her.

Ruggles was no coward, but the situation shot him through with a sudden chill. Like most people who live in France and read the daily press of that country, he had not the slightest desire in the world for an encounter with French footpads or any of their kind. In this he is hardly to be blamed, since he realized, as must all people who are acquainted with the French type of bandit, that, once departed on an act of violence, he has no idea of where to stop. At violence of any kind he seems to develop an insensate fury to which there is no control, and the results are often of indescribable horror. Ruggles read "Le Petit Parisien" and other sensational journals, and was quite aware with what sort of a situation he had to deal.

Nevertheless, he braked, dismounted, and let his bicycle fall upon its side; then turned to the

girl a face nearly as pale as her own. He saw at a glance that she was English, not only from the pure Anglo-Saxon type of her blanched face, but from her dress. Besides, the fact of her being quite alone in so isolated a spot showed that she could not possibly be French. The two young thugs had not changed their positions at Ruggles's approach; they merely swayed at the waist, gave him a sullen look, then muttered something that Ruggles could not understand.

"What do they want?" asked Ruggles in English, of the girl.

"They — they want my purse," she answered unsteadily. "I gave them a franc each to buy some food, but when I opened my purse, they saw a twenty-franc piece — and now they want that. Perhaps I'd better give it to them."

Ruggles looked at the tramps. Both were young men, not more than twenty at most, swarthy of feature and with the heavy, clumsy strength of a certain type of French peasant. They seemed little more than brute beasts, and in all probability were for the moment far more dangerous, as even tigers and hyenas do not inflame their savage blood with absinthe and marc. Ruggles, watching them warily, saw what was coming, — or, at least, what was being planned in the slow-witted, perverted brains, — a crashing blow on the head for him; then some crime indescribably horrid. Such things were constantly being described in the press. True, the

fugitives were always taken a few hours later by the Gendarmerie National and sometimes punished and more often not, this laxity of justice accounting, no doubt, for the increasing prevalence of such crimes.

But he did not wait for this dénouement. The pair were almost on the edge of the bank, not six feet from where he stood, and before their dulled faculties had time to realize that the occasion called for defensive, rather than offensive, action, they found themselves splashing into the swirling river; one with his front teeth badly loosened and the other blinking and cursing and wondering what had happened to his right eye.

The water was only shoulder deep, and Ruggles, seeing that they were in no danger of being drowned, spun about and grabbed the girl by the elbow.

"Can you ride a bike?" he gasped.

"Yes —"

"Then jump on mine and beat it. I'll follow with your stuff."

He grabbed up the bicycle and held it while she mounted; then ran a few steps and gave the girl a vigorous push. She started off, wabbling dangerously close to the edge of the bank; then found her pedals and straightened her course. As Ruggles turned, he saw a shock head thrusting itself above the rim of sward, and without pausing to reflect that he might be destroying a masterpiece, he

grabbed up the easel, canvas and all, and smote. The head disappeared, with another splash from below. Ruggles seized the paint-box and, forsaking the easel, which was merely a flimsy five-franc affair, took to his heels in pursuit of the girl, who had already skimmed under the old stone-arched bridge and was out of sight around the bend.

But this panic of hers was of short duration, and Ruggles came on her a moment later standing beside the bicycle and looking back fearsomely.

"Are they coming?" she asked breathlessly.

"I don't believe so," he answered. "I guess the ducking cooled 'em off. We'd better keep on, though."

"Do you think they could have drowned?" she asked. "The river was deep right under the bank."

"Oh, they're all right," he answered. "I looked over and saw them hanging on to the bushes. One of them started to climb up, and I swiped him over the head with the easel. I'm sorry, but your picture fell into the river."

"Never mind the picture. Let's hurry on. I say, it *was* plucky of you! Such horrid beasts!" She gave a little shiver. "I fancy it would have been all up with me if you had n't come along just then."

"Oh, they may have been just trying to bluff you into giving up your purse," said Ruggles, though he had his doubts on this score.

He took the bicycle by the handle-bars, and they started to walk on rapidly, with occasional backward glances. The girl had recovered herself and, though still rather pale, was entirely self-possessed.

She told Ruggles that while she had been making a study of the river, the two tramps had come along the towpath and, after pausing for a few moments and making some flattering remarks about the sketch, had informed her that they were making their way back to Paris from Epernay, where they had gone hoping to find work. But there had been no work to be had, and they were penniless and hungry and in need of shoes. She had given them a franc apiece, saying that that was all she could spare, but unfortunately they had caught sight of the money in her purse and it had aroused their cupidity. When Ruggles had arrived on the scene, one of the tramps had been saying to the other that a person might easily fall into the river and drown, just at that point, and nobody be the wiser.

"I was horribly frightened," she concluded, "and if you had n't come at that moment, I meant to jump into the river and try to swim across."

As she talked, Ruggles observed her with unobtrusive admiration, and he thought that he had never met a more charming girl. She was of little less than his own height, which was five feet nine, strongly, but gracefully shaped, with a smooth, broad forehead, dark chestnut hair, with delicate features, and slaty-gray eyes fringed by a double

row of long, dark lashes. Everything about her pleased him exceedingly.

Finding that they were not pursued, they slackened their pace.

"Are you doing a bicycle tour?" asked the girl, glancing at the waterproof bundle on the handlebars.

"No. Just a little spin for the day. I'm in business in Paris. Been there for the last three years. My name is Ruggles."

"Mine is Darthea Westbrooke," she answered, and Ruggles thought the name precisely fitted her. "I live in Paris, too, with my aunt, Miss Challand. We're stopping for a few days at this little village on ahead. I'm studying art, and I wanted to make some sketches of the river. We come out here quite often in the summer. Here's aunty, now."

Ruggles had already seen approaching them a woman with a tall and rather angular figure, who walked with a swinging, masculine stride, the speed of which increased as she discovered her niece strolling along in company with an entirely strange young man. She bore down upon the couple like an osprey on a brace of young and downy ducks, and Ruggles observed that her features were high and, at that particular moment, severe.

"Suppose you thought I was never coming, my dear," said Miss Challand, and stared questioningly at Ruggles. As a rule, of which that particular morning was the rare exception, Miss Challand

took excellent good care of her pretty niece, to which more than one admiring stranger could bear witness.

"This is Mr. Ruggles, aunty," said Darthea; and added to Ruggles, "My aunt, Miss Challand."

Miss Challand returned Ruggles's best professional bow with a brief nod, and the austerity of her face did not soften. Darthea quickly smoothed the situation. In a few brief words she described what had just occurred, and, having the artistic temperament, she may possibly have exaggerated the heroism of her rescue, quite omitting the precipitate retreat of the rescuer. Ruggles, listening modestly, was impressed by the fact that perhaps he was more of a hero than he had realized. Whether true or not, it was certainly gratifying to hear Darthea's glowing version of the affair, while the gradual softening that overspread Miss Challand's austere features was if anything even more flattering. Then, much to his surprise, he discovered that the aquamarine eyes of the spinster were filling with tears, and that her sallow skin held a warm flush. At the conclusion of the brief narrative, she took a stride forward and gave him a grip of the hand that might have made him wince, had he been of the wincing sort.

"Good for you!" said Miss Challand huskily. "Mercy, what an escape! All my fault for letting the child go off alone. We ought to inform the gendarmes immediately."

"Oh, I don't think I'd do that if I were you," said Ruggles. "They'd haul 'em up before the *juge de la paix*, and we'd have to hang around and give evidence, and then they'd let 'em off with a warning. I guess they've had their lesson."

"Well, perhaps you're right," admitted Miss Challand; then glanced at a small cheap watch on her bony wrist. "It's nearly twelve. Can't you come and have *déjeuner* with us, Mr. Ruggles? We're stopping at the little hotel on the river, and there's usually a *friture de la Marne* and an omelette and a salad and cold meats and things."

"Thank you, I should enjoy it very much," said Ruggles.

CHAPTER II

THE Paris branch of the great Walkeasy Shoe Company of America was, like all of the company's retail stores, a splendidly stocked and handsomely furnished establishment which did a steady and profitable business and was the despair of the local trade. It was situated on a prominent boulevard in the heart of the city, and there was seldom a space of five minutes in the day when its handsome plate-glass doors were not swinging open to welcome the coming or to speed the parting customer.

The Walkeasy Company was naturally very proud of its handsome retail stores, and the managers of these stores were in turn proud of their various equipments and the high-class character of their personnel. In the Paris branch there were seven salesmen in the gentlemen's department and four saleswomen upstairs in the ladies'. Of the male clerks, two were Americans, two French, one English, one German, and one Spaniard. Of the Americans, one was Ruggles. They were trim, well-dressed, efficient young men, and all on excellent terms with one another, though frequently of but slight esteem in the eyes of the manager, who was a fat and fussy Frenchman with an undue sense of his own importance and a tongue which could be bitingly insulting to those over whom he held

the power of bread and cheese. In the whole establishment there was but one employee whom he did not dislike and who did not return the sentiment with an interest which compounded with almost every passing day. From a business standpoint, however, he was a good manager and kept the store up to the highest of commercial levels.

The middle of the forenoon following his adventure on the Marne found Ruggles in the shop trying on a pair of shoes. He was not trying them on his own trim feet, but upon those of a listless young American tourist who was leaning back in the chair with a cigarette hanging from his lips, his hat on the back of his head, and a bored, petulant look in his watery eyes.

Down on his knees before this peevish youth, who was of about his own age, knelt Ruggles, shoehorn in hand and the vortex of a veritable maelstrom of shoes. His face was rather red, for his customer's listless remarks had been in no way flattering to ready-made shoes in general and to those of the Walkeasy Company in particular, while Ruggles's patient and respectful efforts to fit a well-shaped shoe to a badly shaped foot had met with no return courtesy nor appreciation.

"Go easy, there," snarled the customer as Ruggles eased his foot as gently as possible into a buttoned box-calf; "I got a hammer-toe with a tender callus on it. Hang it, your beastly shoes are all too low across the foot —"

"I can ease that for you over the sore spot," said Ruggles.

"Ease it be damned," replied the customer peevishly. "Have n't you got anything higher across the foot?"

"I'm afraid not, sir, in that shape," said Ruggles, who had been at his task for nearly half an hour and had tried every available shape and form in the required size; "but I'm quite sure that I can make this one comfortable."

"Oh, never mind," snapped the young man; "I'll try somewhere else. You bet my shoemaker 'll hear from me when I get back to N'York. Just put that old shoe on again, will you?"

Ruggles did so in silence, and the pampered youth got up and limped out in sulky silence and without a word of thanks or regret. He belonged to that class of people, not so uncommon, who take courtesy on the part of a clerk for an obsequiousness to be met with rudeness, and who are accountable for the lack of this former quality which is unfortunately becoming so prevalent in many shops.

Ruggles gathered up the loose shoes and proceeded to put them away in silence. Such an experience as this was unusual for him. Thanks to his pleasing manner and its utter freedom from that subtle hectoring peculiar to some salesmen and so irritating to certain people, once addressed he very seldom failed to effect a sale. Regular

clients once served by him usually preferred thereafter to wait until he might be free rather than to have their needs attended to by one of the other clerks, all of which counted in Ruggles's favor on the sales slips. He prided himself on being a good retail salesman of the best shoes on the market, and it was a matter of gratification to him that his tact and delicacy were of such quality that the most modest of lady clients never objected to his fitting their delicate ankles even with high gaiters, if they were in a hurry and the saleswomen were all busy. It had never occurred to him that there might be a double reason for this, one being the wholesomeness of his open, boyish face and the other the fact that they regarded him and his shoehorn in precisely the same impersonal light. No doubt they also felt instinctively that he would be every bit as nice if, after taking down a dozen boxes from the shelves and having made several pilgrimages to the reserve stock in the cellar, they might come to decide that their needs could not be satisfactorily supplied.

So far as his immediate forbears were concerned, Ruggles had really no legitimate quarrel with his place in the world. His father had made shoes, or parts of shoes, all of his life, for many years as an operative in a manufacturing concern from which the Walkeasy had partially sprung. It was there that he met Ruggles's mother, a pretty Irish girl and also one of the factory force. Ruggles, senior,

had been with the Walkeasy Company as foreman ever since its incorporation, and being of an inventive mind, he had evolved some highly valuable machines for stretching and stitching calfskin. Any one of the elder Ruggles's inventions, if properly handled, might have brought him a small fortune. As it was, they had been appropriated by the company, which in compensation had slightly increased his salary, but had paid him no royalties. Unfortunately, Ruggles, while a clever inventor, had been a poor business man, and when he had died suddenly of pneumonia, it had been found that his savings were all invested in worthless paper. Ruggles, junior's, mother had died when he was twelve years old.

So Ruggles, junior, had been left penniless on finishing school, and, following hereditary instinct, had gone first into the factory and afterwards into the retail service of the company. He liked the business and was at this time full of ambitious dreams, for it had been hinted to him that if his success in selling shoes were to continue on the same high plane, he might before long be promoted to the managership of a new retail shop which there was some talk of opening in Vienna.

Ruggles, it must be understood, was really and sincerely proud of the great industrial machine of which he was so small a working part. It seemed to him a magnificent achievement for an American concern to enter into successful competition

with the trade of Europe and beat it on its own ground. The splendidly equipped retail shops in Paris and London and other cities suggested, in a way, the powerful outposts of an invading army, carrying as they did the American ensign far and wide and compelling admiration for American enterprise and commercial daring. Ruggles had loftly visions of the day to come when, these outposts pushing farther and farther into the East, the sun would never set on the flag of the Walk-easy Shoe Company; when, no matter what the hour, in some part of the world the doors of the company would be open to customers, whether in New York, Paris, Budapest, Bombay, Hongkong, Sydney, Honolulu, San Francisco. And he, Ruggles, might be commandant of one of these dépôts, jealously guarding the interests of the great organization and defying the attacks of foreign trade rivals. It was an inspiring thought.

Of course he was still young for such a position, but he knew the business thoroughly and stood well with the company, and he felt that he had a certain claim to advancement, not only on account of his own faithfulness and devotion, but because of his father's efforts in its behalf. As a matter of fact, Ruggles, senior's, inventions had been of far greater commercial profit to the company than even the inventor had ever dreamed. A man of any business sense would have resigned his salaried position and found some means of producing

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his machines for the benefit of his own interests, requiring either the Walkeasy or some other shoe manufacturers to pay well for the products of his brain. Had he done so he might have got very rich and Ruggles, junior, might have been touring Europe in a high-powered car with no other aim or ambition than to have a thoroughly good time. Which proves that his situation was better for his parent's lack of initiative in a commercial sense.

The morning following Ruggles's adventure on the Marne passed in its usual well-ordered manner, and, the noon hour arriving, Monsieur Durand, the manager, went out for his *déjeuner*. In the absence of Durand, Ruggles, as senior salesman, was nominally in charge of the shop. There were others who had been longer in the Paris store than he, but he ranked all but Durand in seniority of service with the company. In a general way the organization of the Walkeasy Shoe Company was based on the principles of a military service, which, however, did not prevent a more efficient employee from being promoted over the heads of his less capable seniors — which same may be said to hold true of any service, whether it be military, commercial, or of any other sort, and nobody can deny the justice thereof.

It was the slack hour, and Ruggles was looking out upon the traffic flowing up and down the boulevard when a big, heavy limousine of American make drew silently up to the curb, and from it

there descended a handsome young giant with a fresh skin and the hall-mark of his nationality stamped most legibly upon him. Ruggles had a good look at him as he stepped down from the car, and his vigorous young heart went off with a whirr of a motor when the clutch is suddenly released with the gas turned on full. He recognized that strong, good-humored face with its heavy forehead, high-bridged nose, masterful jaw, and dark, deep-set eyes. At a single glance, it proclaimed the young man as Richard P. Downing, Jr., the illustrious son of an illustrious father, which latter was none other than the president and principal stockholder of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America.

Ruggles had no need to look again at that strong, rugged young-old face. In his honest heart, Ruggles was a good deal of a hero-worshiper, and the Downings, father and son, were his most favored idols. He had followed with the keenest interest the career of Dick Downing at Yale, rejoicing at his numerous successes — which it must be admitted had been rather athletic and social than intellectual — and condoning his few failures as due to a lack of proper support on the part of those whom he had striven so hard to lead to victory. Dick had captained the football team, stroked the crew, and won other athletic victories as opportunity offered, for his had been the good old days when trainers' jealousies had not been

allowed to interfere with the athletic glory of Yale.

This brilliant epoch at an end, Dick had buckled down to work like a sturdy colt which, after having kicked up its heels in the pasture for a term, is not too proud to throw its neck into the collar. He had started in to find out how shoes were made, and had helped to make them, working shoulder to shoulder with the operatives in the factory and swamping prejudice with the overflow of his big, kindly nature until he had undergone a sort of apotheosis and become the factory deity. This was not the result of handicraft alone. He had interested himself in the conditions of the employees and bettered those conditions with never so much as the faintest hint of patronage. Instead of devoting his attention to the perfection of labor-saving devices, he had devised means for the saving of labor as represented in his toiling fellow men and women, and the result had proved more profitable than the invention of soulless machines could possibly have been. It must be admitted, however, that the profits had not accrued solely to the company. Several thousands of human beings who worked for the company had been likewise benefited.

But Ruggles's adoration of this demigod was not based solely on such impersonal tenets as these. While employed in one of the New York retail stores, he had one day come into personal rela-

tions with Dick Downing, who had dropped in to buy a pair of shoes. Ruggles, who had waited on him, had been shocked to observe that he was shod in footwear of an alien brand. Worse than that, they were the shoes of a sharp business rival. He alone of all the people in the shop had penetrated Dick Downing's *incognito*. Discovered thus in sin by the ingenuous Ruggles, Dick had laughed.

"The proof of the pudding's in the eating, old chap," he had said to Ruggles. "Don't give me away. I wanted to satisfy myself how they compared with ours. They're punk!" And he had paid his bill, shaken Ruggles warmly by the hand, and departed, with nobody in the place the wiser.

But now, as he stood quivering at the door, an even greater shock was in store for Ruggles. Dick, having descended, turned and held out his hand to assist a lady to alight, and as Ruggles stared fascinated, he saw that this transcendent vision of loveliness was the pulsating original of the portraits tacked about the walls of his little Passy abode. It was actually Ruth Downing, the only daughter of Richard P. Downing and the sister of Dick. Ruggles had a sensation as of a great many small white mice scrambling up his spine.

But in spite of this Olympian invasion, he did not lose his head. Everything was in order for the visitation of the heaven-born, and Ruggles was conscious of a soul-searching exultation that the honors of the reception were to devolve upon him

and not upon Durand. The much bebuttoned boy whose duty it was to tend the door had scampered off to lunch, so Ruggles opened the doors and waited.

The two Olympians did not immediately enter. They paused to examine the display of samples in the window and, so far as Ruggles could ascertain, seemed pleased with the exposition.

"Very latest models," he heard Dick say, as he bent his Jovian brows on the display. "Good a show as I've seen in any of our shops, at home or over here."

Then they came in, those shining ones, and it seemed to Ruggles that they shed a glow. Perhaps they did, for it would have been hard to find their like in a search through many cities; the young man strong, dominant, and kindly, with the features and body of a youthful Vulcan; the girl sweet and thoughtful of face, with very dark, examining blue eyes, a Grecian nose, the classic purity of which was made seductive by the suggestion of an upward tilt, a full-lipped, mirthful mouth, set not precisely in the horizontal line, and a chin like her brother's, though without the cleft — or, at least, with no more than a suspicion of it. Aside from this feature, there was slight family resemblance between the two. Dick Downing reverted to the pioneer type of his American ancestors in his bold features and powerful frame, while his sister inherited her lithe, supple figure from their mother,

the granddaughter of an Irish earl whose son had emigrated to California in the days of '49. Ruth looked a child beside her big, deep-chested brother and might easily have passed for his daughter, although he was but seven years her senior. Ruth was just turned twenty.

Brother and sister were of the finest type which a nation can produce, and of which it is safe to say the American product is the greatest. They were the wholesome, industrious children of strong, hard-working parents.

Ruggles stepped back as they entered, his face quite pale from sheer excitement and his eyes very bright and round. He looked like a mere boy. Dick Downing glanced at him with a sudden flash of recognition which gave to his big features, harsh in repose, a strikingly pleasant expression.

"Hello!" said he. "So you're over here, are you? Remember me?" And he thrust out a hand that might have throttled a bear.

"I certainly do, sir," Ruggles answered, meeting the firm clasp. "You're Dick — I mean —"

"That's right." A laugh rumbled in the chest of the young giant. "I'm Dick Downing. How long have you been here in Paris?" He turned to his sister. "Ruth, this is Mr. Ruggles, who used to be in the Twenty-third Street store."

Ruggles, flushing with delight at being thus remembered, took the gloved little hand that was offered him and managed to mumble something

in response to the girl's kindly greeting. But he did not lose his head, for the simple reason that it was not a part of his nature so to do. He was thinking, not of himself, but of what splendid people these were, and how glad he was to see and talk to them. He was like a little child meeting strangers for whom it conceives a sudden and violent affection. Had he been fourteen years younger, he would have proceeded immediately to show them all his toys.

But aroused to the sense of his responsibilities, he said to Dick: —

"I'm sorry, sir, but our manager, Mr. Durand, has just gone out to lunch. If you'd like to see the store —"

"Oh, that'll have to wait," said Dick smilingly. "Our call is not official. We want some shoes. You see, we're off on a flying tour to Switzerland and might want to do a little tramping around, and we've got nothing with us but light walking-shoes. What have you got in stock?" He shot a quick, appraising look about the store, then glanced at his sister. "Nice, is n't it, Ruth?"

"Very," she answered, "though I must say I'm not so terribly keen about this transition period between Art Nouveau and late Cunard Line. But it *is* awfully neat and sound and practical," she added hastily.

"Sure — that's what you want," said Dick genially. "It's got this Early Pullman plush junk beaten a length and a half against the tide. These

individual chairs are so much better than those old plush settees that held about a hundred billion microbes to the square inch. Comfortable, too —" He cast his great frame into one of these stanch articles of furniture and the oak frame creaked.

"Perhaps Miss Downing might like to step upstairs to the ladies' department," Ruggles suggested.

"Thanks, I won't bother, now that I'm here," Ruth answered, smiling. "I can tell you precisely what I want, and it's bound to fit, because the shape was got out from a plaster cast of my own foot."

She gave the necessary data to Ruggles, who fled away to secure the desired article. A moment later, when he returned, Dick was chatting pleasantly with the cashier, to whom he had introduced himself and who appeared to be in that state of self-possessed embarrassment peculiar to a Frenchman when in conversation with one representing the powers that be. The salesmen present appeared to have gathered the fact that the shop was entertaining exalted personalities and had spread the information to the floor above, where the pretty French saleswomen were peeping over the balcony, examining Ruth through admiring eyes. Sibilant whispers descended therefrom. "Qu'elle est chic! Regardez-moi sa fourrure! Et quel joli teint —" More whispers. "Mon dieu, qu'elles sont fraîches, ces Américaines —"

But Ruggles was no more embarrassed than might have been a high priest officiating before the shrine of a patron saint. If his fingers trembled a little as he slipped off the little shoes, it was from pure devotional exaltation. He guided the slim, shapely little foot into the high walking-boot with the skill of an orthopedic surgeon fitting an artificial limb, and was rejoiced, but not surprised, to find that the adaptation was perfect. The wonderfully accurate machinery of the Walkeasy factory had followed those perfect contours to the fraction of a millimeter. The shoe fitted as if cast upon its model.

He laced it up with deft hands, to find that above the ankle a certain unsuspected fullness of limb exhausted the length of the lacing and spread the shoe-top rather too far apart for a perfect fit. Ruth, it appeared, had slender ankles, but plump legs. Observing Ruggles's concern, she laughed.

"I posed only for the foot," said she. "Some other girl must have furnished the model for the ankle. Leave them on, please. They fit perfectly and are just the thing for the road. We're off for Vichy this very minute. Father is waiting for us, at the Travelers', and we're to pick him up and lunch at Fontainebleau. Oh, and I'd like some trees, of course, and half a dozen pairs of silk stockings — those new, reinforced ones, if you've got them in stock. Dick and I will probably do a lot of tramping about."

Ruggles ran up to the ladies' department to secure these last necessities, and when he returned, one of the other salesmen was fitting Dick with a pair of heavy-soled country walking-boots. His wants were quickly supplied, and brother and sister left the shop with a friendly word of farewell to cashier and clerks. Ruggles followed them out to the car, and Ruth got in, but Dick, catching sight of a stationery shop across the street, was reminded that he wished to buy a fountain pen.

"How long have you been with the company, Mr. Ruggles?" Ruth asked, as they waited for Dick's return.

"Seven years, Miss Downing," he answered. "My mother and father both worked in the factory of the old Golden West Shoe Company, which was taken over by the Walkeasy. We're a shoe family." He smiled.

"Just as we are," said Ruth. "Father started in the leather business, you know, and some day Dick will probably succeed him, and Dick's son succeed him, and so on through generations, I hope. A good business ought never to go out of a family, I think, even after its fortune is made. Are your parents still with the company?"

"No," answered Ruggles, "they both died some years ago. I was an only child."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Ruth, and her eyes softened. She regarded thoughtfully for a moment the handsome face with its fresh color and light blue-

gray eyes, and the sun flashing from the yellow, wavy hair. "It seems to me," said she slowly, "that the company might give you something better than a salesman's position."

"Oh, I guess that'll come in time," said Ruggles cheerfully. "Promotions are slow with us, because everybody in the Walkeasy gets a square deal and sticks to his job. I draw top pay now for a salesman."

"You ought to, I'm sure," said the girl. "But there must be openings, as the business increases. I heard father say not long ago that they were planning to establish a new store in Vienna. Why don't you try for the managership? Put in your application to the European general manager and get your own local manager to endorse it. Don't wait for the company to push you ahead. Companies don't do business that way. There's no harm in trying."

Ruggles, looking into the earnest violet eyes, was conscious of the rush of some new and very stirring emotion.

"You're mighty kind, Miss Downing," said he. "I guess I will. I've heard about that new Vienna store. Trouble is, though, I don't speak a word of German."

"Then get busy and learn it," said Ruth briskly. "You speak awfully good French. I heard you talking to the saleswomen upstairs, and your accent is perfect. I should n't say it, I suppose, but,

well — trying on shoes is n't the most — er — distinguished sort of work for a man."

"I never saw anything to be ashamed of about it," said Ruggles.

A little line of annoyance drew itself across Ruth's pretty forehead.

"Of course not," she answered, "but — well, all the same — Oh, all right, stick to it if you like it better." Her face grew slightly pink, and she drew back as her brother approached with his plunging stride.

"Well, good-bye, old chap, and good luck," said he, shaking hands with Ruggles. Then, to the chauffeur: "Back to the Travelers' — where you left Mr. Downing."

Ruth did not offer her hand, merely returning Ruggles's shopman's bow with a friendly nod. The big car glided quietly away and, after standing for a moment staring thoughtfully after it, Ruggles reëntered the store.

CHAPTER III

On returning to his room that evening, Ruggles spent a good half-hour in serious and steady contemplation of his favorite portrait of Ruth Downing — a half-page reproduction of a photograph that he had clipped from "Town and Country," and which represented that charming girl in the act of serving in a tennis tournament.

"I guess she was sort of disappointed in me," mused Ruggles to himself. "She thinks I'm just an unambitious little mutt that's satisfied to go on for the rest of my life down on my knees with a shoe-horn and a button-hook, fitting shoes. Well, I'll show her!"

Thereupon he produced some sheets of the store's official correspondence paper kindly furnished him by the pretty stenographer (who cherished secretly a tender sentiment for the clean-cut young American) and proceeded to compose an excellent businesslike letter to the European general manager, stating his qualifications, recalling the faithfulness, not only of his own service, but that of his father before him, and making his official application for the management of the new Vienna retail store. In this letter, he stated that he had mastered the French language sufficiently for all practical purposes in six months' time —

a pardonable exaggeration — and that having a natural gift for languages, he hoped to be able to accomplish as much with German, the study of which tongue he proposed to begin at once.

To this letter Ruggles had no difficulty in persuading Durand, his own immediate chief, to write a sufficiently commendatory endorsement. Durand had no friend or relative of his own eligible for the position, and Ruggles was the only member of his own force whom he did not actually dislike or by whom he did not feel himself disliked in return. Consistently with his narrow nature, he was inclined to resent the fact that the honor of receiving the Downings had devolved upon Ruggles and not upon himself, and showed a disposition to be disagreeable at not having been sent for post-haste on the arrival of the probable future president of the company and his sister. But on Ruggles's explanation that they were pressed for time, Durand was sufficiently mollified to write a perfectly fair endorsement, reflecting as he did so that if at any time in the immediate future he had occasion to be displeased with Ruggles, he could always send an unofficial letter stating that subsequent events had led him to believe that Ruggles was scarcely the man to fill the important position of local manager, to the best interests of the company.

Before the end of the week, Ruggles received a courteous reply from the European general man-

ager saying that his application had been duly received, approved, and forwarded with the proper endorsement to the home office. He was pleased, also, to commend Ruggles's ambition, and trusted that his years of faithful service might soon meet with their due reward, as the retail stores in Great Britain, France, and Italy had proved so successful that there was every prospect of establishing others in Austria and Switzerland within the coming year.

After reading this letter Ruggles's face shone with such a radiant light that the customers he waited on were loath to leave the store, and to one busy man running in to replace a broken shoelacing he sold two pairs of shoes, a pair of pumps, a dozen pairs of socks, two tins of polish, and a pair of Down-East garters. Ruggles's zeal was irresistible. He felt that his beloved company had proved its title to good faith with a loyal employee and the recognition of earnest effort on the part of two generations of the Ruggles family. To Ruggles, in his exalted state, its precepts seemed almost Biblical. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," read the message in the letter. "Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things."

The truth of the matter was that the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America, like other big industrial enterprises which have reached a high mark in the world of trade, owed much of its success

to that essential factor of all successful organizations, the faculty of putting the right man in the right place. Whether it be the administration of Church or State, empire or democracy, district or borough, community or family, this fundamental principle of cohesion is necessary to success. All of the world's great organizers, from St. Peter to Carnegie (which is a long cry), have been endowed with this genius. A careful selection of bishops with a talent on the part of the said bishops for selecting other foremen, who may in turn be able to distinguish the skilled workman able to weld souls or iron, may be productive of tremendous results, always provided that the material is properly selected.

Then, as though the star of Ruggles's fortunes was at last to shine bright and clear through the dissipating mists of mediocrity, there came a change in the personnel of the establishment which seemed to the boy as though ordained by Providence to further his interests, while at the same time proving of benefit to others. Ruggles's principal chum and particular friend had been a young man of his own age, a fellow salesman named Simon Streletski, who was a French Hebrew with a decided talent for painting. On Sundays and holidays Ruggles and Streletski had frequently made short tours on their bicycles to different picturesque points in the environs of Paris, where, after their picnic luncheon under the trees on the

bank of the Seine, Streletski would make charming little studies and sketches for which he was now beginning to find a good market. Thus encouraged, he resigned his position with the company to devote himself entirely to painting, and his place was filled by a tall, gaunt Viennese, silent and spectacled, who spoke good French, Spanish, and Italian, beside his native tongue, of course, but whose English was most indifferent. Learning that his colleague was eager to perfect himself in this tongue, Ruggles, who for lack of time and opportunity was making poor progress with his German, suggested that they exchange lessons, to which the Austrian, whose name was Lorenz, readily agreed.

Wherefore, the two foregathered as opportunity offered, whether in their own rooms or in rambles about the city. Herr Lorenz was not a particularly congenial companion, being gloomy and saturnine and often critical to the point of rudeness. Also, he was of a miserly disposition, and it was invariably Ruggles who paid the tram or bus fares, for the coffee that they sipped in front of some café, or for an occasional textbook. Lorenz had a habit of setting out with no money in his pockets. But Ruggles did not object. It is doubtful if he even noticed this peculiarity on the part of his fellow student.

Lorenz, however, proved an excellent teacher, and Ruggles made rapid progress. The conver-

sations of the two were alternately in English and German, with French to fall back upon when either was at a loss. In the course of this association, Ruggles confided to Lorenz his motive for mastering the German tongue as quickly as possible, at which the Austrian asked a few pertinent questions in regard to Ruggles's reasons for being so sure that he stood in the direct line of promotion. On hearing the situation explained, with the buoyant optimism characteristic of his comrade, Lorenz became gloomily distrait for several minutes. Following this period of distraction, he returned to his English with increased application. The next day he made himself disliked in the store by reason of certain fawning assiduities directed toward Durand, who, however, appeared to accept these attentions as his natural due, and rendered for the first time by one who was sufficiently intelligent to understand the relative positions between manager and salesman. Thereafter he patronized Lorenz, but favored him. If Lorenz sent a *pneumatique* to say that he was laid up with a sore throat, Durand had been lenient in the extreme. When, on the contrary, Simon Streletski had got a bad spill on his bicycle and hurt his knee, Durand had been, as the pretty French typewriter (who loathed him with reason), declared: "Tout ce qu'il y a de méchant."

Miss Challand had asked Ruggles to call, and Ruggles had done so, to find the two ladies in-

stalled in a tiny studio apartment on the gardens of the Luxembourg. He had already discovered, while lunching with them in their little hotel on the Marne, that they were very poor in this world's goods, for Miss Challand had mentioned their circumstances with the same indifference that one might use in speaking of a spell of bad weather. But it had been immediately evident to Ruggles, who had made a considerable study of human nature — as seen over the top of his shoe-horn — that his new friends were ladies of birth and distinction whose poverty was in no way commensurate with their breeding and connections. Miss Challand was the niece of a lord bishop, and Darthea was the orphan daughter of the late Captain Westbrooke, of the British army.

Ruggles, who liked and respected them both extremely, wondered if perhaps he ought not to state frankly his own position in life. Had the opportunity offered, he might have done so, with perhaps the information that the company owed its present great success to the mechanical inventions of his father, but that, owing to this parent's lack of business ability, he, Ruggles, had been obliged to begin with a subordinate position and to work his way up. But as neither lady showed the slightest curiosity in regard to his personal affairs — they fearing that possibly he might be "in trade" and preferring to accept him on his obvious merits — Ruggles held his peace.

For since his meeting with Ruth Downing, ambition had seized his soul, to shake it as the swift current of the Marne shakes a reed.

So the days fled past, and Ruggles, working hard, had but a single cloud upon his fair horizon. This was due to his learning that the Vienna branch was almost ready to open its doors for trade, while he had as yet received no official directions to hold himself in readiness for a change of place. He wrote again to the European general manager, recalling his former application, and received a rather brief reply which contained no more than the information that his letter had been received and would be duly considered. Still, it was courteous in tone, and Ruggles, a born optimist, told himself that he was sure to get his promotion very shortly.

For Ruggles was possessed of that peculiar doglike devotion to the big industry, of which he was an honest though humble component part, which becomes in some natures almost akin to religion. His belief in the company, from its head to the point of its well-shaped toes, was like the confidence of one of Napoleon's trudging private soldiers in the infallibility of the Grande Armée. Ruggles handled one of the company's latest models with the loving admiration which the aforesaid private might have bestowed upon a new and beautifully constructed arm. It represented the weapon which was destined to make conquest assured;

which was going to make Europe sit up and beg. And it was outrageous to suppose that the great organization which was able to equip so well its individual units should lose sight of these units as individuals. Therein lay the religious sense; the faith in a recognition from higher up of honest and devoted service.

CHAPTER IV

DARTHEA needed a new pair of shoes. She had needed a new pair of shoes for a long time, as Ruggles had himself observed to his great concern. Darthea might have needed a new gown or a new hat or a new pair of gloves or a new pair of almost anything, for that matter — which no doubt she did — and Ruggles would have been able to endure her necessity with fortitude. But he had grown very fond of Darthea, of whom he had seen a good deal, and it hurt him to see her need of some nice new shoes when he lived in an atmosphere so rich in this commodity. Sometimes, glancing surreptitiously at her dainty feet, his mind would turn involuntarily to the box that contained precisely the shape, size, and style which would best serve and adorn them.

But the time came when Darthea's little feet were almost on the ground, and the uppers of her shoes were in such condition as to make resoling a useless extravagance. This questing of getting shod was always a serious one to Darthea and her aunt, because, though they bought shoes but seldom, they bought good ones, which cost upwards of twenty-five francs the pair. Shoes and gloves were about the only items of their wardrobes which they were unable to make for themselves,

but gloves are not dear in Paris and can be made to last for a long time. The kid does not wear out, and as it stretches and the seams tear it can be trimmed and restitched. Clothes can be made and hats are easily managed by a person of observation and natural taste. Darthea could walk demurely up the Champs Élyseés, get a passing glimpse of a creation which might have cost three hundred francs, then go home and concoct something of the same sort which looked much prettier (on her head), for about five.

But there is really nothing very much to do about shoes except to buy them, and this expenditure on Darthea's part representing the equivalent of a week's food for the pair of them, it was a matter to be approached with great care and consideration. Darthea during her sojourn in Paris had been in the habit of buying her shoes at the big department store, "Merrie England," which was nearly opposite the branch store of the Walkeasy Shoe Company on the Boulevard des Capucines.

Wherefore, accompanied by Miss Challand, who was much more insistent than her niece on the question of fit and finish, and therefore commanded a more painstaking attention, Darthea set out to buy her pair of shoes. The weather had been stormy for several days, which rendered the purchase more peremptory, so they caught a bus, descended at the Place de l'Opéra, and walked up the Boulevard to "Merrie England."

"I'm sure you'd do much better at the Walk-easy shop across the street, my dear," said Miss Challand. "Their shoes may cost a little more, but you would get quite the worth of it in wear and comfort."

Ruggles would have felt like embracing her could he have heard this.

"Possibly," Darthea answered, "but I hate those pug-nosed American shoes, aunty. Besides, I like to do my buying in a British shop."

But alas for the inscrutable ways in which Fate controls our destinies! A swift examination of their stock appeared to demonstrate that Darthea's particular requirements were the only ones that the British shop was unable to supply at that particular moment. They were expecting hourly a new consignment of goods, and if the lady could call again in a day or two, she would find the precise article for which she asked. Darthea did not wish to call again. It was a Saturday, and she and her aunt had an engagement to walk with Ruggles in the Bois the following afternoon, stopping at the Pré Catelan for tea, and she wanted to wear her new shoes. Wherefore, politely expressing their regret to the suave youth who had waited on them, Darthea and her aunt left the shop and paused for a moment to open their umbrellas.

"Fancy a man of any self-respect spending his days on his knees taking off and putting on muddy shoes!" said Miss Challand, gathering up her skirt

as they waited for the traffic policeman to blow his whistle. "I'd rather be a *garçon de café*."

"I never think of them as men," said Darthea. "They seem part of the shop furniture."

"For my part," her aunt replied, "I much prefer to be waited on by a woman."

"What does it matter?" answered Darthea indifferently. "Oh, dear, I must have my shoes for to-morrow, to go to the Pré Catelan. We might meet some of Mr. Ruggles's friends, and these wretched things will be worse than ever after this wading around in the mud."

"You'll find just what you want across the street at the Walkeasy shop, I'm sure," said Miss Challand.

"The name is enough to turn one away," Darthea observed. "Fancy! 'Walkeasy'! It's not even grammatical."

"But very American. Mr. Ruggles wears them, I'm sure. People will look at your feet and take you for an American."

"Not if they keep on looking and notice my hat and dress," Darthea answered sadly. "American girls are much more chic than English. They *wear* their clothes. We hang them on ourselves."

"Nonsense! It's just because they usually have more money to spend on them. I could be chic myself if I had about a hundred a year to spend on nothing but clothes."

The policeman blew his whistle and raised his

white club, whereat the procession stopped, more or less. At any rate, it slowed sufficiently to enable the foot traffic to dodge across with no great amount of danger. Darthea and her aunt gained the opposite sidewalk sound of limb, though slightly spattered by the sticky slime ground from the creosoted wooden blocks and which eats into fabrics like vitriol. Opposite the hospitable doors of the Walkeasy shop they paused for a moment to look at the handsome display of samples.

"Why do they put those silly bumps on the toes?" Darthea asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. For the same reason that the French make their shoes duck-billed, I suppose. Because they think it's pretty. Anyhow, they're jolly comfortable and wear like iron. Let's go in and see if you can find anything to suit you." Miss Challand stepped to the door, which was swung open in front of her. "My word," said she, "the place is jammed!"

The Walkeasy store was, in fact, doing a rushing business, principally in the sale of rubber overshoes, for the continued chilly rains were reaping their harvest of early autumn colds, and the public was taking its precautions — a little late, as the public usually does. Miss Challand, expecting Darthea to follow at her heels, made a dive for the stairs leading up to the ladies' department, only to find the place packed with insistent customers, a good half of whom were French. The

other half appeared to be composed of most of the nations of the world that are not French. With a snort of disgust, for the air was a bit oppressive, she looked around for her niece. But Darthea was not there.

Darthea was very much not there. Darthea was in fact standing in a trancelike condition at the foot of the stairs, staring with fascinated eyes at Mr. Ruggles, who, quite unconscious of her near presence, was down on the knees of his well-pressed trousers at the feet of a swarthy and perfumed individual who looked as if his ancestry might have been terribly confused in the Balkans, where trouble is always to be found. His emanations were principally of perfume, garlic, tobacco, cognac, and sachet powder — with due recognition to the brilliantine on his well-cared-for beard and mustache.

But Ruggles appeared as oblivious to these æsthetic objections as a dentist at work on a bad tooth or a sweet young girl of small fortune and large ambition ardently wooing an elderly millionaire. He was so close to Darthea that when he turned to reach for the heated bunion-stretcher a recumbent part of him brushed her skirt — and she drew back with a little shiver of almost anything. Her eyes were as big as the peculiar egg-shaped blossoms in the handsome and expensive Art Nouveau decorations of the place, and she was quite unable to tear them from Ruggles. His

well-shaped hands were slightly soiled from the street slime (which is composed of too many ingredients to attempt analysis) on the shoes of his customer, but he wiped them on a cloth conveniently at hand, powdered the wet sock, of which the fabric had yielded a little over the distal phalanx of the hallux (which is to say the end of the big toe), and with his charming smile slipped the pedal extremity into a low box-calf C-10.

"Pinch a little at the toe, sir?" asked Ruggles solicitously, for the gentleman whom he was serving was furnished with rather well-developed pedal digits (which is to say bunchy toes) from having padded barefoot over the Kopaonik Mountains in his youth. "Let me stretch that out for you, sir. Take but a minute, and believe me, you will find it very comfortable."

"How mosh — dem shoon?" asked the swarthy gentleman.

"Twenty-five francs, sir," Ruggles told him.

"Too mosh. I gif you zwenty."

"Oh, we never change our price, sir," said Ruggles, smiling up at him pleasantly. "It's not the way business is done in America, and this is an American company that we represent here."

"Jess — I know," grunted the customer. "I am American myself — of Chicago. I go now by Belgrade to fight dose Osmanlis (Turks). I am of ze reserve corps. Captain, y' understand? All right. Gimme dose shoes. Dey look all right."

"Very good, sir," said Ruggles. "Will you take them, or shall I have them sent?"

"Send dem around to l'hôtel de France et de la Serbie."

Darthea heard no more. The Balkan gentleman had risen and was being escorted by Ruggles to the desk, while Miss Challand, missing her niece, descended to find Darthea clinging to the newel-post and staring wildly in the direction of the cashier's desk.

"My dear!" cried Miss Challand. "What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"I feel — I feel —" Darthea began; and then, catching sight of Ruggles scribbling off his sales-check and knowing that he might turn at any moment, she said hurriedly, "I want some air. Let's go out."

Miss Challand, noting the dilated pupils and curiously congested look of Darthea's cheeks, lost no time in getting her to the door.

Once in the open air, Darthea appeared to breathe more freely.

"What is it, dear?" asked her aunt solicitously.

"Oh — just the smell of that horrid shop," Darthea answered. "Never mind the shoes, aunty. Let's go home."

"Very well. But what was it that upset you so?" Miss Challand stopped short in her tracks. "Was anybody rude?" she demanded.

"No; of course not," Darthea answered shortly.

"I simply felt — felt ill for a moment. Let's walk. It's not raining hard, and I'd like the air."

"Your feet will be sopping," objected her aunt, "and your shoes —"

"Oh, bother my shoes!" exclaimed Darthea, so sharply that her aunt gave her a quick, sidelong look filled with apprehension. She had never known her niece to give way to nerves, and Darthea certainly did not look ill. On the contrary, her eyes were bright and had a peculiar hard expression that Miss Challand had never seen in them before, while on her cheeks, usually of a delicate pink, there was a flame which attracted the attention of passers-by. Miss Challand was worried and perplexed.

"My dear," said she, "I believe you have fever. Your face is crimson."

"It 's nothing," Darthea answered shortly. "Coming in from the fresh air into a stuffy place like that always makes me feel a bit stifled. I don't take exercise enough, I fancy."

Miss Challand reflected that the atmosphere of the spacious shop of the Walkeasy Shoe Company was certainly not lacking in ventilation, even though laden with the aroma of fresh leather and the usual odors of scent and clothes and other things pertaining to a crowd of people of any class. She decided to herself that Darthea must be overtired as the result of long hours spent before her easel, for the girl was a hard worker, and Miss

Challand was glad that the next day was to be Sunday and hoped that the weather would permit of their programme for spending the afternoon in the open air. She reflected also that Ruggles always seemed to exert a cheerful influence upon her niece, and as the air appeared to be growing less heavy and the clouds breaking up, Miss Challand encouraged a similar atmospheric change in her own kindly soul, sufficiently freighted with its burden of care.

CHAPTER V

To awake in the morning with a cool, fresh tingling of the skin and the sense of strongly renewed energy of mind and body; to turn drowsily and rest for a moment and feel the vital impulse gathering to meet the shock of another day and to master it; to see the bright sunshine flooding the open window and listen to the birds singing outside; then, as fuller consciousness arouses from its period of repose, to spurn the couch and to leap forth ready and eager for that which the day may bring forth. Such were the sensations of Ruggles as he bounded out of his little iron cot, stretched his arms above his head, freed his muscles from the constraint of eight hours with scarcely a change of position, and felt the gathering exhilaration "as of a giant who rejoiceth to run his course."

It was Sunday, and as Ruggles gasped from the contact of the cold water from his big bath-sponge, he was in two minds as to how he should spend his morning — whether to attend service at the English church and walk down afterwards as far as the river with Miss Challand and Darthea, or to look up Lorenz, who had not put in an appearance at the store the day before and whom he feared might possibly be ill. He decided in favor of the latter, as he was to see Darthea in the afternoon,

and, while he had no particular liking for Lorenz, he felt sorry for the man, whose disagreeable nature made him a recluse and who had no friends in Paris, so far as Ruggles was aware.

This solicitude for Lorenz was quite uncalled for. As a matter of fact, the saturnine Austrian had, with the sanction of Mr. Durand, crossed the Channel on Friday night and by special appointment spent an hour of Saturday morning in consultation with the European general manager of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America. This interview resulting entirely to his satisfaction, he had returned immediately to Paris.

Ruggles dressed with care and went down to the little dining-room for his *petit déjeuner*. Beside his place was a letter addressed in Darthea's round English hand. Ruggles opened it at once, fearing that something might have occurred to prevent Darthea from walking with him in the afternoon; in which supposition he was quite correct, for the note read as follows: —

DEAR MR. RUGGLES: — This afternoon, on entering the shop of the Walkeasy Shoe Company to make a purchase, I was extremely surprised to discover that you are employed there as a clerk and to see you in the act of serving a customer.

I do not know how your social distinctions may be drawn in America, but among English people of the class to which my aunt and I belong, it is not the custom to admit on terms of intimacy persons engaged in such forms of occupation as your own proves to be.

I do not wish to seem unkind, and I acknowledge fully the obligation which led to our acquaintance and the great service which you so pluckily rendered me. But what I am quite unable to forgive is your having deceived Miss Challand and myself in regard to your station of life, which you led us to believe was one which corresponded to our own. This deception has led to social relations which otherwise could never have existed between us and which must be hereafter discontinued.

Yours truly,

DARTHEA WESTBROOKE.

Ruggles laid down the letter with the glow all gone from his face. What had the girl supposed him to be, anyhow? A Vanderbilt or an Astor? Had she thought that, if he were rich, he would have taken her aunt and herself around Paris on the tops of trams and buses?

Being totally unable to understand, he came to the very natural conclusion that Darthea must have thought him guilty of having tried to sail under false colors and to give her aunt and herself the impression that he was a person of considerable importance in the world of trade. He remembered having once hinted that he hoped shortly to be entrusted with a position of responsibility which might make it necessary for him to live in Vienna, and he reflected that after such a statement it must naturally have been disappointing to her to find him trying on shoes.

Darthea, after all, could scarcely be expected to understand that a man might be fitting cus-

tomers one day and occupying the proud position of manager in a similar store a week later. Artists were always impractical folk, and Darthea was an artist. She had very evidently jumped to the conclusion that he had been exaggerating his business importance with the idea of trying to impress her. She was really not to be blamed, the more so as the mere fact of her being so upset over finding him engaged in trying on shoes showed that, in her opinion, such an occupation was unworthy of him. After all, very likely she was right, and he had been abusing his talents in remaining for so long a time a mere salesman.

Ruggles's face cleared, and he took a gulp of his *café-au-lait*. He decided to call on Darthea immediately after luncheon and explain his position, trusting to her friendship and sense of fairness to forgive him for having kept her in the dark as to his actual work, and to tell her of the expected change in its character. Meanwhile, he would look up Lorenz.

Lorenz lived in a little hotel in Neuilly not far from the Porte Maillot, so Ruggles took the "Metro," changing at the Étoile. Going directly to Lorenz's room, he knocked at the door. "Entrez," came a voice from within, and Ruggles entered. The young Austrian was in his shirtsleeves and apparently engaged in packing a small black trunk. At sight of Ruggles, he straightened up, with a startled expression on his saturnine face.

"Hello!" said Ruggles. "Moving?"

"Yes," Lorenz answered, "I am moving." A tinge of color came into his sallow cheeks, and he glanced sharply at his fellow clerk. "I do not like it here," said he, in a rather sullen, half-defiant voice.

"It ain't much of a place," Ruggles admitted, glancing out of the unwashed window into the slovenly court on which it opened. "I could n't stand an inside room. You don't get enough air, and they make such a racket with their pails and things. Where are you moving to?"

Lorenz leaned over to lay a pair of trousers in the trunk.

"I am going to live with some relations," he muttered, as if begrudging the information.

Ruggles, feeling rather embarrassed, seated himself on the edge of the bed. It struck him that Lorenz was not very hospitable; also that he seemed loath to offer any information in regard to his change of residence. Perhaps his relations were people in the lower walks of life; they might run a laundry or sell horse-meat or have a little workman's café or something of the sort, and Lorenz might be rather ashamed of them. Ruggles knew nothing of Lorenz beyond the fact that he hailed from Vienna, where he had been a clerk in an Austrian shoe-shop. Lorenz had always been rather reticent about himself. His fad was the natural sciences and particularly physiology. He had

served an apprenticeship under the leading chiropodist of Vienna and had persuaded the proprietor of the shoe-shop in which he had worked to permit him to open a little parlor in connection with the store where clients might have their pedal inconveniences treated free of charge, something on the principle of certain American restaurants which supply gratuitously to their customers antiseptic toothpicks and a stick of pepsin gum. The idea seemed an excellent one, as the German-made shoes and chiropody marched one on the heels of the other with the unison of the lock-step. The proprietor had finally consented to the scheme, but unfortunately the first subject for Lorenz's skill had come near to losing his foot. In the ensuing lawsuit Lorenz had traitorously claimed that this was due to certain toxins in the German leather, in which theory he was to some extent vindicated, as the bacteriological culture made from a sample shoe had developed a robust colony of microbes which ate up all the agar-agar jelly in the tube in a single night and asked for more. Altogether it had been a most lamentable incident, and might have resulted in a duel between Lorenz and his employer but for the fact that the former was afraid to fight and the latter did not dare.

Aside from their lessons, Ruggles felt no great interest in Lorenz, nor did he esteem him highly, the more so as when calling on him one rainy afternoon he had found the young man pleasantly en-

gaged in vivisecting a mouse which he had partially anæsthetized in a milk-bottle by means of the introduction of the tube from his gas stove. He had demonstrated to Ruggles the action of the heart, which continued to beat for a minute or two before stopping in diastole. Ruggles had not cared for the demonstration, and had pointed out to Lorenz that after all it was rather superfluous, since everybody knew that a living mouse's heart must beat if the mouse were to go on about his business. It was like trying to prove that corns were tender by stepping on them, the only difference being that the mouse was not in a position to resent the operation.

Ruggles did not pursue his inquiries in regard to Lorenz's future movements, but merely suggested that they take a stroll in the Bois for the sake of conversation and mutual lingual benefit.

"I'm beginning to get the hang of it now, Lorenz," said he cheerfully. "I sat up half the night doping out those verb-endings you gave me, and I'd sort of like to see if I can lay my hands on the ones I need. Say, learning a new language is sort of like the shoe business, ain't it? You get all the stock that you need sorted out on the shelves and know just where to put your hand on the box that you want, and then there comes a rush hour with a lot of customers in a hurry and if you don't look out you'll grab the wrong box every time."

"You will never learn to speak good German," said Lorenz dismally. "Your mind is not of the right sort."

"What's the matter with my mind?" asked Ruggles, rather irritated.

"It is not profound. It yoomps always at the first thing it sees. And you do not talk enough with your mout'."

"Well," said Ruggles cheerfully, "that ain't always such a bad thing. Most people talk too much with their mouths."

"The mout' is the organ of speech, together with the soft palate, the larynx — and — and some odder t'ings. The nose is not an organ of speech. It is for smelling. And you talk most often by the nose, like all Americans." He turned from the trunk, the corners of which he had been wedging with shoes. "Excuse me —"

Ruggles rose from the edge of the bed. Lorenz rolled back the mattress and took from beneath it a black cutaway coat. Smoothing it gently over his arm he looked at Ruggles. His expression was not an agreeable one. Ruggles wondered why.

"You have very much to learn yet," said Lorenz.

Ruggles, not knowing to what particular branch of learning he might refer, answered easily: "Oh, I guess we all have, so far as that goes. But I can tell you one thing, old man — I have n't got such an awful lot to learn about the shoe business. I worked a couple of years in the factory before I went into

the store. I know the shoe business, all right. Why should n't I, by golly? My father was a shoemaker before me. He invented most of the machines that the Walkeasy people are using to-day. I know how shoes are made, and I know how to sell 'em, too, and once I get charge of this Vienna branch, you 'll see some leather in the air. Just you keep your eye on me."

Lorenz gave him an owlish glare.

"And what if you do not get this Vienna branch?" he asked, with the suspicion of a sneer.

"Oh, there won't be any trouble about that," Ruggles answered. "I've as good as got the promise of it. The company ain't the kind to turn a fellow down when he's worked for 'em as I have. You're the only one besides Durand that knows I've been after this job, and I don't mind telling you that I've got it pretty well cinched."

"You have it what?"

"I've got it where I want it," Ruggles answered impatiently. "The only thing that bothers me is not hearing something definite. They must be pretty near ready to open up. You have n't heard anything about it, have you?"

Lorenz folded his tail coat neatly and wrapped it in a copy of "Le Matin," before laying it in the trunk. Using some wads of soiled underclothes as dunnage he carefully tamped down the top layer so that the lid of the trunk would close, then turned to Ruggles.

"I would not count too much on anything," said he.

"What d' you mean?" Ruggles asked.

"I mean it," answered Lorenz, "and it is so. A man should never count on anything or anybody. It is the way of the world. You seen that coat I have just put in my box? I bought it in which to be married."

Ruggles pricked up his ears. He looked at Lorenz from another slant.

"What happened?" he asked, in a more softened voice.

"What has happened?" Lorenz glared at him as though Ruggles had flicked him on the raw. "I will tell you what has happened. I was to marry the niece of that man who had the shop where I worked in Vienna, and because of some troubles with a customer, there was a quarrel. It was very bad. She would not see me once more, so I packed my trunk and came to Paris. But I promised to myself that one day I should go back to Vienna and take all of his trade, even if I had to work myself for nothing and to bones and skin. And perhaps it may come true, already."

Ruggles stared at him, fascinated. It seemed as if a new and undeniable bond of sympathy were suddenly established between himself and Lorenz.

"Say," said he, "I know just how you feel. I been up against it, too." He wiped his face with his handkerchief, for the stuffy little room was

hot. "Maybe when I get out there, I can help you some."

"You cannot help me at all, yet—" Lorenz snarled.

"Oh, well," answered Ruggles reassuringly, — for he felt sorry for Lorenz, — "no harm meant, old man. Girls don't always mean just what they say, though. But when it comes to trade, if I don't make those pikers out there shut their doors once we get going, my name ain't Ruggles, that's all. And when we're going some, maybe I can fix it for you —"

"You can fix nothing for me," — Lorenz's voice was almost a squall, — "and I am very busy!"

"Oh, all right," said Ruggles soothingly; for now that Lorenz had confessed to a tragic love affair, he was ready to excuse anything. "I won't bother you then, old man." He moved toward the door. "But if I can be of any service to you —"

"You cannot. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," Ruggles answered; and went out, thinking that, after all, a man might be crossed in love, meet with business reverses, and still be a little appreciative of disinterested friendship. He was sorry for Lorenz, who seemed to be an honest, patient, hard-working sort of fellow, and he hoped that some day he might be able to help him in some way.

After leaving the ungracious Lorenz, Ruggles bought an American paper at a news-stand and

walked across to the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, where he sat down on a bench to read and to admire the passing throng. The latter occupation was, however, soon neglected for the former, as the war in the Balkans was just fairly begun, and Ruggles found much to interest him in the accounts of the military movements. Like many men of humdrum occupations, Ruggles loved to read of violence and strife. His favorite fiction was of the swashbuckler type, but he was very fond of the historical romance and had recently finished Sienkiewicz's series of the Polish wars, "With Fire and Sword" and "Pan Michael," than which there are no more sanguinary modern classics to be found. Military affairs had a fascination for the boy and his readings supplied vicariously a certain craving in his nature.

Ruggles read on, so deeply absorbed in the account of the movements in the near Orient as to be quite unmindful of the gay procession sweeping past him. Across the broad avenue groups of riders were dashing gayly along the equestrian path; motor-cars of every description whizzed along; fiacre-drivers cracked their whips, and on the wide footpath was the usual brightly colored parade of a cosmopolitan fashionable world and the usual sprinkling of smart nursemaids and governesses with their toddling charges.

An elderly French pair seated themselves on Ruggles's bench and engaged in an animated conversation.

Ruggles finished his Balkan war news and, letting the paper fall upon his neatly trousered knee, watched with pleasure the kaleidoscopic crowd. He was sitting thus when a pleasant voice said in English: —

"May I share the end of your bench, sir?"

Ruggles glanced up and saw a well-dressed, wholesome-looking young man of about thirty, broad of shoulder and with a strong, kindly face, of pleasant expression.

"Certainly," Ruggles answered, moving aside a little. "Sit down."

"Thanks."

The young man seated himself, resting his gloved hands on the curve of his stick. For a moment or two he watched the glittering spectacle in silence; then he turned to Ruggles.

"A great sight," he observed. "Especially when you see it for the first time."

"Yes," Ruggles agreed, pleased to be addressed and noting that the other spoke with a pronounced English accent. "I guess there ain't a city in the world that's got anything to beat the Avenue du Bois on a bright Sunday morning at this time of year."

"Believe you're right. There's such a lot of room — and that long sweep running right up to the Arc de Triomphe is ripping."

A group of officers, beautifully mounted and in pale-blue tunics with scarlet breeches, cantered

past. Ruggles's companion watched them with interest.

"Good-looking gees," he commented, "though I must say I don't think much of the riding. Look at those chaps bob."

"Some of them can ride, all right," Ruggles answered. "If you take in the horse-show, you'll see some snappy work. But all the same, they're not in the same class with our American cavalry when it comes to riding — or anything else, I guess," he added patriotically.

"You're American?"

"Yes. But I live here in Paris. I work for an American shoe concern."

"I see," said the other, and shot him a swift glance.

Like most casual acquaintances of Ruggles, he had taken the boy for a young American tourist, probably a student.

They chatted for a moment or two, and then the Englishman, whose clear blue eyes had been caught by the headlines on Ruggles's newspaper, asked in his crisp, pleasant voice: —

"I say, might I have a look at your paper? I could n't get one this morning, and I'm awfully interested in the Balkan news."

"Of course," said Ruggles. "Keep it, if you like. I'm through reading it. What do you think's going to happen out there?"

"There's going to be a big fight, I'm afraid, and

I fancy the poor old Turks will get an awful drubbing. As a matter of fact, I'm on my way out there."

Ruggles straightened up and looked at the other with a sudden interest and admiration.

"You are?"

"Yes. Leaving to-morrow night for Marseilles, where I get a ship for Constantinople."

"War correspondent, perhaps?" Ruggles asked.

"No, I'm a surgeon in charge of a unit of the British Red Cross. My crowd have gone directly from England, but I wanted to catch a glimpse of France."

"Gee," said Ruggles; "I wish I was going."

"It's not going to be all beer and skittles," replied the other, and rose. "Well, I must be getting on, since I've only two days to see Paris. You're sure you've finished with this paper?"

"Oh, yes," Ruggles answered, sorry to have this brief encounter terminate.

"Thanks awfully, then. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, sir. Good luck," said Ruggles.

"Thanks."

He swung off with a brisk, athletic stride in the direction of the Bois, while Ruggles looked after him wistfully.

He felt strangely alone and rather depressed after the young doctor had gone, and presently got up himself and wandered down the Champs Élysées and across to the Boulevard Saint-Germain, where

he lunched at a little restaurant patronized chiefly by students from the École de Médecine and therefore inexpensive. Then, judging that Darthea and her aunt must have finished their *déjeuner*, he turned his rather nervous steps toward the Gardens of the Luxembourg.

CHAPTER VI

MISS CHALLAND opened the door, and, as Ruggles wished her "good-afternoon," he heard the swish of skirts and caught a glimpse of Darthea, as she passed swiftly from the studio into the adjoining bedroom, closing the door behind her.

"I'm glad you've come," said Miss Challand. "I hate mysteries, and I can't get a word out of Darthea. All that she will tell me is that she wishes never to see you again and that she wrote you to that effect."

"She certainly did," answered Ruggles, much relieved to find that Darthea had not attempted to prejudice her aunt in his disfavor. His naturally buoyant spirits promptly rose as he followed Miss Challand into the little studio.

"Now, then," said that lady, seating herself and motioning to Ruggles to do the same, "what 's it all about? I 'm sure that you could have done nothing that was not nice."

"If I have, I did n't mean to," Ruggles answered, warming under this kindly expression of confidence. "I guess I 'd better tell you all about myself from the start, Miss Challand."

"I think that would be best. To tell the truth, I've sometimes felt that I did n't know as much

about you as I should of a young man who has been so much with my niece."

"There is n't much to tell," Ruggles answered. "You see, it's like this: My father worked for the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America."

"In what capacity?" asked Miss Challand, slightly raising her eyebrows.

"He invented machines for stitching soles and shaping the uppers and the like of that," Ruggles answered. "You could hardly understand without seeing the process. He drew good pay and might have been well fixed now if he had lived and had n't invested his savings in good-for-nothing mining shares and the like. He wanted me to learn the shoe business from the bottom up, so I started in the shops —"

"In the factory where the shoes were made?"

"Yes; I learned the whole process."

"I see. Not a half-bad idea if one decides to go in for trade, though I must say I think he might have looked a little higher for you, especially in a country like America, where I understand that there are so many business opportunities."

"I guess you don't quite understand, Miss Challand," said Ruggles. "The Walkeasy Shoe Company is one of the biggest industrial concerns in the United States. Our factories cover over ten acres of ground, and you could shoe the whole population of Paris with our annual output of high-class stock. But that ain't the point just now. Some day I'll

show you the figures. What I was going to say is that there seemed a better chance for a live young fellow to get on in the retail branch than in the factory. You see, it won't be many years before we have big retail stores like the one here in Paris doing business in most of the big cities of Europe, and these stores have got to have managers that know the trade."

"But surely you would never care to become the manager of a shoe-shop?" said Miss Challand.

Ruggles stared at her dazedly, doubting that he could have heard aright. Not care to become the manager of one of the Walkeasy Company's splendid stores, with some dozen salesmen and saleswomen, cashier, bookkeeper, people of the delivery department, and others, under his immediate orders? Not care to realize this proud height of his present ambition? Was the woman "balmy"? What did she expect, anyhow? That he was going to make one bound from the foot of a customer's chair to the seat of the general manager's? He felt bewildered for a moment; then, reflecting that she was English and a woman, and, as both, scarcely to be expected to have any conception of modern commercial methods, he answered with the smile which had seldom failed him in critical moments:—

"You don't understand yet, Miss Challand. Nowadays, if a young fellow wants to get ahead in a big business, he's got to start at the very bottom of the ladder and work up step by step; that is, un-

less he's got a pull with the concern and a place all made for him. Even then, the chances are that all he has to do is to draw his pay and let somebody who knows the business do the work for him. But that ain't real business, and the Walkeasy Shoe Company don't run theirs that way. They give the best job to the man that's best fitted for it and pay him what he's worth. Why, do you know that the son of the president of our company" — Ruggles's voice was slightly moderated at the mention of the president as though he had been a lay brother speaking of the grand master of his order — "worked in the factory, just as I did? He went to work at seven o'clock in the morning with his dinner-pail, just like the rest of us. Say, when he was at Yale — the boy, I mean — his old man wanted to get a rise out of him —"

"A — what?" Miss Challand interrupted.

"He, our president, wanted to see if the boy was a piker —"

"A — what?"

"He wanted to see if he was the real thing," Ruggles explained. "He wanted to see if he was getting too big for his pa — I mean, if he was good and strong for the concern that his father was the head of, and not proud, and the like of that. The boy was playing on the team, — the football team, y' understand, — so his father sent one of our big New York delivery automobiles up to New Haven for the Princeton game. It's a great big shoe with

a door in the heel and the trade-mark on the side. Well, believe me, that wagon was the hit of the day. Young Downing — that 's our president's name — had the cart full of rooters, and they rooted for Yale and the Walkeasy at the same time —"

"What do you mean — they rooted?" asked Miss Challand, who was getting carried away despite herself by Ruggles's enthusiasm. "They were the team?"

"Oh, no. They were —" Ruggles searched in his mind for the synonym of "rooter." "They were Yale students; backers, as you might say. They invented a yell —"

"A yell?"

"Yes; a college cheer. In the United States all the different colleges have their cheers. You see, they holler 'em all together and believe me, Miss Challand, it sounds fine when several thousand people all cut loose at the same time. Young Dick Downing's bunch had a yell like this: —

Walkeasy, talkeasy, rah-rah-rah —
Kick hard, lick hard, yah-yah-yah.

And then there was a song about the shoe on the foot of the leg of the man that kicked the goal, and, would you believe it, Dick Downing — he was captain of the team and playing fullback — did kick a goal from the field and saved the game, and they say the crowd went crazy. It was a great day for Yale — and for the Walkeasy Company.

I heard the advertising manager say that it was worth thousands to us—" Ruggles leaned forward and looked at Miss Challand with sparkling eyes. "That shows the sort of folks that are at the head of the business," said he.

Miss Challand listened as might one who tries to follow an interesting description in an unknown language. Not being by any means dull, she was impressed with the fact that there was something by no means paltry behind all of this ardor; something true and real which raised Ruggles's enthusiasm for his branch of trade above the level of mediocrity. She was bound to admit that he himself seemed far superior to such tradespeople as she had ever come in contact with. He seemed to take a real and personal pride in the business, as though the mere association invested him with some peculiar grace. Miss Challand felt rather dazed.

"You see," Ruggles went on, "Dick Downing is the real thing — the real American. He'd be just the same eating out of his dinner-pail in the factory with the stitching-room gang as he would at the training-table of the football team, or anywhere else; just the same nice fellow. The men he worked with in the factory all called him 'Dick,' and he liked it. That's the way we are in America. It does n't make any difference that his father's a millionaire and a big swell into the bargain. Dick Downing ain't too good for any of us, nor his sister,

either. Why, do you know they came into the store about three months ago, and you'd have thought we were old friends the way they treated me? And here he'll probably be our next president —"

"President of the United States?" exclaimed Miss Challand, for the reverential hush of Ruggles's tone as he mentioned this exalted office impressed her in spite of her bewilderment.

"No — president of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America," said Ruggles. "And his sister, Ruth Downing, is just as fine as Dick. Say, she's a wonder, Miss Challand. I'll show you her pictures, some day. While I was trying on her shoes —"

"Trying — on — her — *shoes!*" gasped Miss Challand. "Do you try on — shoes?"

"Sure!" answered Ruggles. "That's my job —"

"And she gave you her pictures — after you had tried on her shoes?"

"Oh, no. I cut them out of weekly papers and pinned 'em up around my room. She's a beauty, and just as nice as she is pretty. While we were waiting for her brother, she asked me if I was satisfied with my job and wanted to know why I did n't ask for something better —"

"Then, am I to understand that your present — er — job, as you call it, is waiting on the customers in the store — fitting them with shoes?"

"That's it," answered Ruggles stoutly. "But it's not going to be much longer. After what Ruth Downing said, I put in my application for the man-

agership of a new store we're about to open in Vienna, and I've as good as got the job. I'm expecting to get orders to go out there any day."

Miss Challand stared at him stonily. Had Ruggles stated that he was a humble agent of the white-slave traffic, but hoped shortly to be given charge of a disorderly establishment, she could scarcely have set her face in more rigid lines.

"Why did n't you tell us of this before?" she demanded.

"Oh, I don't know — but it was n't because I was ashamed to. I thought I'd wait until I got my promotion."

"And to think that all of this time you have been going about the city with my niece!" Miss Challand's voice was almost shrill.

"Well, why not?" Ruggles's clear eyes narrowed and his brows straightened.

Miss Challand had never seen such an expression on his face, and it excited her. So the man was an impostor — a mere clerk in a shoe-shop who had been masquerading as a gentleman, and so successfully as to have entered into terms of social equality and even intimacy with Darthea and herself! And now that her niece had found him out, he seemed disposed to be ugly about it, if facial expression was an indication of emotions within. Miss Challand's long neck grew rigid and her green eyes became the color of jade. But she realized that she had only herself to blame and must thank her own

laxity for this most unpleasant and humiliating situation. However, the first thing was to get rid of Ruggles with as little fuss as possible.

"There is no use in trying to argue the matter," said she. "Our points of view in this respect are so different that we could never come to any understanding. No doubt in America the lines of social difference are very loosely drawn, but with us English it is quite different. The idea of my niece continuing her social relations with one in your position is quite impossible, Mr. Ruggles."

Ruggles leaned slightly forward, his expression one of mingled perplexity and resentment.

"What's the matter with my position, Miss Challand?" he asked. "And what 's the matter with me? I've always been a hard worker, and I've always been steady. I've got no bad habits, and I always try to be polite and gentlemanly. There was never anything tough about me. Say, Miss Challand," — his voice was almost pleading, — "what's the matter with me, anyhow? Some way I can't seem to dope it out. Where's the disgrace in selling shoes? A fellow has to work his way up, and I'm doing it as fast as a man can. The company is sort of like an army — you've got to go up rank by rank. Why, if I make good, I might be general manager some day — or even president of the company" — Ruggles gave free rein to his imagination for a brief second — "and that's just like being the general of an army, except that there's

a lot more money in it. The business is a big one and laid out on good, sound lines. It ain't as if I was with some concern that took the people's money without delivering the goods. I've noticed that you wear our shoes, yourself. Well, you get your money's worth, don't you? If we were flooding the market with rotten stock and trusting to all sorts of advertising tricks to sell it, that'd be different. But we're not. We sell the best ready-made shoes in the world, and we sell 'em for a fair price. People have to wear shoes, just like they have to eat and drink, and it seems to me that the concern that gives them the best value for their money is doing a lot of good in the world, if you want to look at it that way. I would n't handle a poor article. I could n't sell it. I've got my self-respect, just like anybody else, and I would n't lie about my goods, no matter what they paid me. If I've got anything to be ashamed of, I wish you'd tell me what it is."

Ruggles would never have suspected that amongst his other gifts he possessed eloquence. Miss Challand's tightened features softened as she stared at the flushed, boyish face. She had never before considered the question of trade from the viewpoint so eloquently presented by Ruggles, and her British sense of fair play forced her to admit that it might be well taken.

"Miss Challand," said Ruggles, "I wish I could speak to your niece."

Miss Challand hesitated. She was sorry for Ruggles, but she could not forget that he was a shoe clerk and, even though promoted to the charge of a shop, must still, she felt, be separated from her niece by a social gulf that admitted of no bridging. She quickly reflected, however, that Ruggles would soon be leaving Paris for Vienna, after which they need see no more of him. Besides, he had been guilty of no actual fault, and for the sake of their past pleasant relations, it seemed ungracious to send him off with a snubbing. So she answered a little reluctantly: —

"Very well. I'll ask her to come and listen to what you have to say, Mr. Ruggles, though I doubt whether you will be able to change her attitude."

"Oh, I don't know," said Ruggles hopefully. "She 's a sensible girl and she must have seen enough of me by this time to know that I 'd never try to impose on her."

Miss Challand nodded, and rising passed into the other room. Ruggles stepped to the window and stood looking out across the Luxembourg Gardens. Ten minutes passed. Then the door opened and Darthea entered the studio alone. Ruggles, turning from the window, thought that he had never thoroughly appreciated her high-bred beauty.

"Good-afternoon," said Darthea. "My aunt says that you insist on speaking to me. Well, what is it?"

Ruggles's strong young heart, which had been

beating much faster, though with less force, than if he had just reached the top of the Suresnes hill on his bicycle, slowed as might have done that same machine on striking a wintry blast of air at the top of the said ascent.

"Nothing," said Ruggles shortly, "if you'd rather not have me bother you."

"I tried to make that clear in my letter," Darthea retorted.

"Oh, I guess you succeeded, all right," Ruggles answered, stung as though he had been lashed across the face with a dog whip. In the shop his patience was limitless, partly because he regarded a customer, no matter how disagreeable, quite as impersonally as the customer regarded him; partly because he felt that he owed this politeness to the people who paid him for that and other qualities that go to make a good salesman. But out of the shop it was a different matter. He respected other people's feelings and saw no reason why other people should not respect his. "If I'd thought for a second that you were the sort of a girl to think less of a man because he was working hard to make an honest living and get on in the world, I would have told you long ago that I was just a salesman in the Walkeasy shoe-store. It never came into my head that you took me for a rich man."

"I never did take you for a rich man," Darthea replied. "But I took you for a gentleman."

"Well, and so I am," said Ruggles. "What have

I ever done that was n't gentlemanly, I'd like to know? What I told you about expecting to represent a big American exporting concern in Austria was true. Why, I'm expecting every day to get orders from the home office to take the managership of one of our stores in Vienna; and believe me, Miss Westbrooke, it will be just as fine an establishment, if not finer, than our Paris store that you came into yesterday."

Darthea gave a little shiver, yet her eyes lingered on Ruggles with a sort of puzzled doubt.

"And is that the height of your ambition?" she asked; "to be in charge of a shoe-shop in Vienna?"

"It is, just now," Ruggles answered stoutly. "What more can you expect of a man of my age? No doubt, later on, when I've made good, I may go gunning for something better. You can never tell; if I — oh, say, look here, Miss Westbrooke, it's the same with all of us. Just now you're working hard to get a picture hung in the Salon — and you sort of feel as if that was the height of your ambition, don't you? Well, suppose you do, you're still only one of thousands that get pictures hung in the Salon. You would n't be satisfied with that. The next thing, you'd want a medal, or something, or a picture bought by the State and hung in the Luxembourg. Well, it's just the same in business."

"I must say," said Darthea coldly, "I fail to see any connection between art and business."

"There is, though," said Ruggles stubbornly.

"There's got to be art in everything that's made, I guess, if you want to make it a success. And there's got to be business in art, too. The two things go together, just like — like a man and a woman." The color flooded his face.

"I fail to catch your meaning," said Darthea, and quite untruthfully, for she had caught it perfectly, both in its abstract and concrete senses.

"Well," said Ruggles, "it's like this. Suppos'n' there was nothing but artists in the world? Who'd supply their materials and build their studios and furnish their food and clothes, and, most of all, buy their pictures? All that could n't go on without business. And, on the contrary, if everything was business, with no such thing as art, the world would be like one big factory. It would n't be worth living in. Believe me, one can't get along without the other, and just for that very reason an artist has n't got any more right to look down on a business man than a business man has got his license to look down on an artist. See?"

Darthea felt rather confused. She understood, in a vague way, what Ruggles was trying to impress upon her and was unable to find any particular flaw in his argument. No doubt, if she had listened to a similar dissertation from the lips of a prominent personage, she might have been quite inspired and joined a League for the Promotion of Art in Trade, or something of the sort. But she could not rid her mind of Ruggles's stretching shoes for the

convenience of the splay feet of the Balkan gentleman, then presenting himself in spotless raiment the following afternoon to take her aunt and herself for a walk and tea in the Bois. Being thus perplexed, she fell back upon her insular reserve, which is in most cases quite as safe as a cell in most well-managed prisons, or monasteries or convents and similar institutions.

"Very interesting, I'm sure," said Darthea, and looked at the door, wishing that Miss Challand would come to her rescue.

Ruggles reddened, and rose from the edge of the divan where he had been sitting. He felt the sudden need of air and exercise. Ruggles was a bit of a physiognomist as well as a pedalist (if there is such a word). He had seen similar expressions to that now worn by Darthea on the faces of customers whose earnest wish was to escape from the store, as quickly and gracefully as possible, without having made a purchase.

Ruggles had no desire to crowd his wares on Darthea. For the sake of the Walkeasy Company he might have made the effort to hold her. But for his own sake he would not. So, with his heart like lead in its mourning for the death of her sympathy, and his eyes as hungry as those of a dog for a slight hint of kindness, he said: —

"All right. Then I suppose there's no need for me to bother you any longer. Maybe you 're right. After all, I'm not in the same class with you, I

guess. I might have known it — if I had n't — if I had n't —" His voice caught in his throat and he walked toward the door, which was rather blurred and indistinct. Darthea followed him, straight and still and white as an Easter lily.

He opened the door of the antechamber, went out — and turned.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," Darthea answered, her hand on the knob to close the door behind him.

"Good-bye," Ruggles repeated. "I won't bother you again."

A sudden mania seized him. He took Darthea's hand, as it rested on the knob of the door, and raised it to his lips. Darthea was too startled to withdraw it.

"Good-bye," Ruggles muttered. "Good-bye, Darthea —" It was the first time that he had ever called her "Darthea."

"Miss Westbrooke, please," said Darthea, snatching away her hand.

"Sure," Ruggles replied. "I forgot. Good-bye, Miss Westbrooke. And say, Darthea," he added desperately, for she had stepped back and was closing the door, "there's just one thing more I want to tell you — " He tried to get a farewell glimpse of her, but Darthea was a shimmering, uncertain vision.

"Well?"

"You'll probably meet lots of richer men than

me," said Ruggles, speaking fast and rather thickly, "but you'll never meet one that thinks more of you than I do. I don't ask anything of you, but if ever you need a good friend —"

"Thank you, Mr. Ruggles," said Darthea, in her most limpid voice. "You're awfully kind, I'm sure. Good-bye."

And the door closed gently in Ruggles's face.

CHAPTER VII

Ruggles went out into the street hot of heart and blurred as to his eyes. But these conditions were as nothing compared to the mystification of his mind. No doubt he felt rather like a dog which has been caught and whipped without in the least understanding why (perhaps because the cat had misbehaved during the night). Ruggles had no knowledge of any cat, nor did he, as many men might have done, consider Darthea as of this class of supreme egoists. He did not blame Darthea; he did not blame anybody. He was merely very puzzled and very sad.

Wandering aimlessly, he crossed the Gardens and came out on the Boulevard Saint-Michel, then turned in the direction of the river, probably following the line of least resistance and because it was easier to walk downhill than on the level. Men are apt to feel that way after such an experience as that of Ruggles. He was tired, too, having walked several miles in the course of the morning, which would not have mattered much under ordinary circumstances, but all the spring appeared to have gone out of his knees, and on arriving opposite the Café Harcourt he slid in behind a table with his back to the wall and ordered coffee.

Repose and the inky mixture of chicory and some

few beans of the order *Rubiaceæ* contributed to clear Ruggles's bewildered brain. With clearer thought came also a certain amount of better cheer, for Ruggles, as has been several times said, was a born optimist. After all, the situation was not so hopeless. Darthea was an artist and very young, and for both reasons infused with more than her due allowance of romance. He had come spinning into her life like a plumed knight-errant and she had endowed him with a station which he did not possess.

Although conscious of a certain tender sentiment for Darthea, Ruggles was by no means in love with her, nor did he deceive himself in this respect. But she was the first girl friend of her class that the boy had ever possessed, and this friendship had been very sweet and dear to him; more so, perhaps, than if it had been colored with passion. He was very fond of her, and deeply admired and respected her, and it cut him deeply, not only in his pride, but in his heart, that she could think him capable of cheap deception. He hoped, however, that on reflection she would relent, in which case he was quite ready and willing to forgive her and be readmitted to her friendship. There was much that was doglike in Ruggles's devotion.

Meanwhile, however, he was cheered by the reflection that there still remained to him two stable quantities on which to nail his worldly faith — the Downings and the Walkeasy Shoe Company. He

worshiped both and felt that neither could ever betray his confidence. Had Dick Downing been accessible, the chances are that Ruggles would have found the courage to go straight to him in his perplexity, for he felt a dire need of friendly counsel after Darthea's apostasy. But he had heard that Dick had returned to America, while Mr. Downing, senior, who was not in the best of health, had remained in Switzerland with his daughter.

It was still, however, with a very heavy heart that Ruggles crossed the river and started to walk up the Champs Élysées on his way back to the little room in Passy where he purposed to spend the rest of the sunny afternoon in the study of German verbs. He had nearly reached the Carlton when he saw a big limousine draw up before the door and an exquisitely gowned girl, followed by an elderly woman, descend and enter the hotel. Though still at some distance, Ruggles's quick eyes had recognized the girl at the very first glance. It was none other than Ruth Downing.

A sudden resolution, the daring of which caused Ruggles's healthy young heart to whirr like a starting taxicab, fetched him up "all standing," as sailors say. Here, sent perhaps by Providence, was his friend in need. Less than an hour ago he had been vaunting the loyalty of the Downing family to their great army of vassals. He would put this loyalty to the test. He would call upon Ruth, explain his trouble — which was after all, more or

less her own doing in having fired his heart with ambition — and demand her sympathy and advice.

There was nothing presumptuous about this swift decision on the boy's part. He felt honestly that it was his right, and there was about it something rather fine and belonging to a feudal age. His mother and father before him had lived and labored and died in the service of the company, which is to say, in the service of the Downing family. He himself was giving the best of his brain and body, the best of his youth, to the same service. Now, as a result of this fidelity, he was more unhappy than he could remember ever to have been, and he could see no reason why he should not turn to a Downing for aid in his perplexity. The responsibilities of liegedom should work both ways.

Glancing at the reflection of himself in the plate-glass window of an automobile agency, Ruggles was quite satisfied with his presentability. As always, he was nicely and becomingly dressed, and he reflected with a certain amount of professional pride that certainly no man in Paris was better-shod or stockinged. It is probable that there was not at that moment a better-looking young fellow between the Louvre and the gates of the Bois de Boulogne than our modest shoe clerk. He entered the fashionable hotel with an air of assurance which he was far from feeling, and sent up his card to Miss Downing — his social card which was in-

scribed simply "Mr. Richard P. Ruggles." Ruggles was proud of that card because two thirds of it were identical with Richard P. Downing, junior and senior.

The boy returned presently to say that Miss Downing would receive Mr. Ruggles in the salon of her suite. Ruggles mounted in the lift, glancing at himself in the mirror and pushing back a long lock of wavy yellow hair, which was slightly damp. He was ushered into a salon prettily furnished in Louis XV style, and perched himself on a chair a good deal as a bird reposes itself for a brief instant on a swaying twig.

The bell-boy bowed and retired, and Ruggles wondered whether perhaps he should have given him a tip. Some minutes passed, and they were not restful ones to Ruggles, who was beginning to repent him of his temerity. Then the door to an adjoining room opened, and Ruth entered. Ruggles could not have told to his dying day what she wore. If it had been a bathing *peignoir*, it is probable that he would not have observed the fact.

It may have been that Ruth had second sight and divined that Ruggles had some real and pressing need of her, or perhaps it was merely her natural graciousness of manner. At any rate, the instant she entered, all of Ruggles's embarrassment vanished, and as their eyes met, he felt that he had made no mistake in coming to her.

"How do you do, Mr. Ruggles?" said Ruth, and

offered him her firm little hand. "I'm very glad to see you. Won't you sit down?"

Ruth was her father's own daughter, her brother's own sister, and no employee of the Walkeasy Company was in any danger of being snubbed at her hands. She would have received the door-boy of the Paris store if she had known that he was in the service of the company. The New York State manager, whom her father had asked to dine with them at their hotel in New York City before they had sailed for Europe, had told her that he had worked his way up through factory and salesroom, and Ruth had no contempt for the humble clerk. In the present case, she thought it probable that Ruggles had acted on her advice to ask for a promotion and had come to thank her and tell her of his success.

Thank her he did, and at once, for her gracious reception, taking his chair again when she had seated herself. Then he hesitated for an instant, not awkwardly, but as though trying to decide just how to begin. He was an easy talker, but much attention on a hurried world had taught him to be brief and concise, wasting no time in circumlocution; so that when he spoke, it was directly to the point.

"I was just coming up the Champs Élysées," said he, "and I saw you go into the hotel. It was sort of funny, because there's something that's bothering me a good deal, and I was wishing that I

knew of somebody who might be willing to put me right. When I saw you, I remembered how nice you were to me that day you came into the shop, and I thought that, maybe, as I worked for the company — which is sort of like working for your family — you might be willing to give me a little advice." His eyes rested on hers with a look of frank, boyish appeal.

"I'm sure I should be very glad to help you in any way I can, Mr. Ruggles," said Ruth. "Has it something to do with what I said to you that day?"

"Oh, no," said Ruggles. "But before I go on, I ought to thank you for that advice, too. I've put in my application for the managership of the Vienna branch. Wrote it that night and sent it off the next day with an endorsement from Mr. Durand, our manager. I guess there won't be any trouble about my getting the job. It looks like I had it cinched."

Ruth's face lighted. "I'm *so* glad!" said she warmly. "Drop me a line as soon as you hear definitely, so that I can send you a word of congratulation."

Ruggles glowed. "Thank you ever so much, Miss Downing," said he. "That will certainly be my first act, as soon as I hear." He hesitated for an instant. "Say, Miss Downing," he asked, "do you think that there's anything to be ashamed of about selling any first-class article directly to customers?

Anything, no matter what, like soap or hats or underclothes or — *shoes?*"

"I most certainly do not!" answered Ruth decidedly. "What I said that day was not to hurt your feelings — as you ought to have had sense enough to know. It was merely to — well — to fire your ambition."

"Oh, I was n't thinking of that," said Ruggles. "You could n't say anything to hurt anybody's feelings if you tried. Then you believe that a man who tries on shoes is just as good as anybody else?" He gave her a keen look.

Ruth knit her broad brows and reflected for an instant.

"I do and I don't," she answered. "It's like this: If the man whose work it is to try on shoes was as good as lots of other men in brains and body and general strong efficiency, he would not be very long contented at trying on shoes for a living, and he would soon be making a better living at a much less menial occupation. After all, it's rather like a servant's work — fitting clothes of any sort to another person's body. Don't you think so, yourself?"

Ruggles's face clouded as he pondered this point of view for a moment. Then it cleared.

"I guess you're right," said he. "I never looked at it that way before. You see, I never thought much about the people who bought 'em. I was always thinking about the shoes."

"That's the reason," said Ruth triumphantly; "and a very good reason, too."

She was liking Ruggles more and more every moment, and this naïve explanation of his pleased her tremendously. Also, it suggested to her mind a quite new idea, which was that while the people who patronize furnishers of various sorts might disregard them, just so might these furnishers disregard their customers except as a means of gaining a livelihood and fitting their handicraft to the objects for which it had been designed. Ruggles's next words crystallized this thought.

"It's like this," said he. "I know how to make shoes and I know how to fit 'em and sell 'em, too. I'm sort of like a blacksmith, as I look at it. But most people have got a good deal of respect for a blacksmith and don't think any the less of him because he fits a shoe to a horse or an ox or a donkey. They don't look at him like as if he was the donkey's servant." He gave her his flashing smile. "In my business, I've shod lots of donkeys — the two-legged sort."

Ruth burst into a laugh, in which Ruggles joined.

"Well," said she, "I think a good deal as you do — but most people don't. Now, there 's Dick. He was perfectly happy to work in the factory to learn how shoes were made. But he'd no more try on a pair of shoes for a customer than he would shave him. And if he ever did try, and the customer happened to be disagreeable, the chances are that

the company would have to pay for a damage suit and a new plate-glass window for the store."

Ruggles laughed and his eyes kindled. He had often felt that way himself.

"Yes," said he, more to himself than to Ruth, "I'm beginning to catch on. I guess Darthea was right."

Ruth pricked up her ears. "Who is Darthea?" she demanded.

"Darthea? Oh, she's an English girl I know. She came into the store to buy some shoes the other day, when I was at work. I did n't see her, but she saw me. And now she won't have anything more to do with me because I sell shoes for a living. You see, her folks are all swells in England. Her great-uncle was a lord."

"Oh," said Ruth softly. She was beginning to understand the deeper reason for Ruggles's call. "Tell me about her. But first tell me this: Why did n't you let her know what your work was?"

"She never asked me," said Ruggles, "nor her aunt, Miss Challand. I only got acquainted with her the day before you came into the store. By the time I got to know her pretty well, I was waiting to hear that I'd got the managership of the Vienna store; so I thought I would n't tell her anything until I was sure, and then give her a surprise."

"I see," said Ruth. She had dropped her chin in her hand and was staring at Ruggles through narrowed lids. "How did you happen to meet her?"

"It was up on the Marne," said Ruggles. "I 'most always go out in the country on my bike when I get a day off, and I was riding along the tow-path by the river when I ran on to a couple of tramps bothering a girl who was painting, all by herself. She'd given 'em a couple of francs, but they had seen some more money in her purse and were trying to scare her into giving it up. I shoved 'em into the river and we both beat it —"

"You shoved them into the river?" Ruth's violet eyes began to glow.

"Yes," Ruggles admitted. "There was n't anything else to do. They were big, husky fellows and had clubs. I took 'em unawares and pushed 'em over the edge of the bank. Then she jumped on my wheel, and I grabbed up her paint-box and ran after her. I waited, though, long enough to see that they were n't going to drown."

"Oh, you did?" said Ruth. "And what if they'd been drowning?"

"Oh, I su'pose I'd 've had to try to fish 'em out," said Ruggles. "But there was no danger. One of 'em started to crawl out and come for me, and I whaled him over the head with her easel, then beat it."

He laughed contagiously, and Ruth joined him, although her mirth had a rather peculiar note.

"And what happened then? Was she all alone?"

"Oh, no," said Ruggles. "Her aunt, Miss Challand, was with her, but Darthea had gone out alone

to make a sketch of the river. We met Miss Challand coming down the tow-path. That's the way we got acquainted."

"And afterwards?" Ruth asked.

Warming under her sympathy, Ruggles told the rest of his story — of how he had become intimate with the two, walking with them in his free moments, sometimes accompanying them on little excursions and to church, or for tea in some modest restaurant. He told also of how Darthea had come into the shop and had seen him trying on shoes, and he showed Ruth the note that he had received that morning from Darthea. Ruth perused it and bit her lip.

"Nasty little prig!" she muttered under her breath.

"What?" Ruggles asked.

"Oh, nothing. And then what?"

Ruggles described his interview of the early afternoon. There came a deep flush into Ruth's soft cheeks as she listened; her dark-blue eyes grew almost black, and she bit her full under lip. His simple narrative finished, Ruggles looked questioningly at her.

"Do you think it was all my fault, Miss Downing?" he asked.

Ruth shook her head. "No," she answered, "I don't think that you were in any way to blame."

"Then what do you think I ought to do?" he asked.

"That depends," Ruth answered. "Are you very fond of her?"

"Yes," Ruggles answered frankly. "I think a lot of her. You see, I've got to know her pretty well, and I'm satisfied that she don't understand. She's a mighty nice girl and has n't got a mean streak in her."

"You're in love with her, I suppose," said Ruth, not as one who asks a question, but as if merely stating a foregone conclusion.

Ruggles sat bolt upright and his eyes grew very round.

"In love with her!" he gasped. "Why — no — nothing of the sort. I've never for a second thought that way about Darthea. Why — it's ridiculous! I guess I've given you a wrong idea about the business, Miss Downing. I just liked her an awful lot and admired her looks and her talent. She's painting a picture for the Salon, right now; a dandy picture of an old mill on the Marne. But I never thought about being in love with her — Gee!"

"Did you ever think about her being in love with you?" asked Ruth.

Ruggles stared. "Her in love with me! Say, you're trying to kid me, Miss Downing." His voice held a note of reproof.

"I'm doing nothing of the sort!" said Ruth crisply. "I'm not that sort. What I'm trying to find out, in order to help you as much as I can, is

why you should both be so cut up about this thing unless you're in love with each other."

"Oh — I beg your pardon, Miss Downing. I see what you mean." Ruggles leaned forward in his chair, regarding her intently. "Well, it's sort of like this. You see, I'm all alone in the world, and sometimes I kind of miss what most other people have got — somebody besides myself to think about. If I had a mother or a sister, it would be different, I su'pose. Well, Darthea seemed to me to be just what I needed that way. She and her aunt are pretty poor, I guess, and they thought that I was well fixed and did n't mind letting me do little things to help us all to have a good time — like going to tea at the Pré Catelan or having a picnic on the river or something of that sort. It never amounted to anything so far as the cost went, and we had a lot of fun. But that was one reason why I never told 'em that I was a clerk in a shoe-store. I was afraid they might think I was spending more than I could afford, and not want to go any more. But, let me tell you, I was never so happy in my life, and why? Just because it seemed like I had somebody beside myself to think about. But there was never any love business about it one way or the other. We've always been just good friends."

"I understand," said Ruth. "And you feel now as if some of your family had gone back on you through no fault of yours. Well, do you know what I would do in your place?"

"No," said Ruggles. "That's just what I want to find out."

"Well," said Ruth slowly, "I would put these two women 'way in the back of my mind, and work hard for the day to come when they'd be mighty glad to resume their friendship with me. I'm pretty sure that that day will come, and so are you. All you've got to do now is to make good, do you understand? You've got your future pretty well marked out. Think of that. You expect to get the managership of this Vienna branch, and you certainly deserve it. After that, you may get the managership of Austria, and perhaps in time the managership of all of Europe, and then of the whole Continent, and then perhaps the whole thing. You're young, and you know the business, and you're going to know it a lot better before you get through. Don't let a little thing like this get in your way."

Ruggles's face glowed. "You're right, Miss Downing," said he. "After all, the company's the main thing —"

"Don't let any silly woman put you off," said Ruth. "Remember that you've got to get on. You owe it to yourself and to the company. You're not like so many men in your position who merely work for the sake of their salary and have their minds always on some girl or foolishness of that sort. Tell me something" — she fastened Ruggles suddenly with her deep violet eyes — "and tell

me the truth. In your room — have you got pictures of Darthea stuck up all over the place?"

Ruggles shook his head with a smile.

"No," he answered; "I have n't a single picture of *her*."

"Nor of any other girl?" She paused and watched the color mounting under Ruggles's clear skin.

"I've got some pictures of *you*," said he.

"Of *me!*" Ruth exclaimed.

"Yes. They're just prints I cut out of illustrated papers. I've had three of them ever since you made your début, a couple of years ago. You don't mind, do you?" He regarded her anxiously.

"I — don't know," said Ruth slowly, and gave him a very intent look. "Have you any pictures of other women? Stage people — or celebrities?"

Ruggles's shocked look amounted almost to indignation.

"Of *course* not!" he answered. "Do you think I'd put things like that on my walls beside *your* pictures? What do you take me for?" His face flushed.

"I beg your pardon," said Ruth softly. "But why did you want my pictures in your room?"

"Well," said Ruggles, "it was like this. I've always been mighty interested in your family, naturally, seeing as I never worked for anybody else. When Dick was in college, I always kept track of what he did in athletics, and all, and kept a

scrap-book of clippings that I cut out of the papers telling all about the games he played and the races he rowed in, and all that. I've got some bully pictures of him putting the shot. And I've got some of your father, and the yacht, and your country place. You see, it was sort of like having a family of my own to keep track of. So when I came across these pictures of you, I naturally added them to my collection — but I liked some of them so much that I tacked them up on my walls," he added naïvely. "They seemed to make my little place more homelike." He glanced anxiously at Ruth, and was a bit disturbed at the curious expression of her face and the fluttering of her long, dark lashes. "I hope you don't mind?" said he.

"No — I — don't mind," Ruth answered, and rose suddenly to her feet. "Excuse me for a minute, please."

She slipped out of the room, leaving poor Ruggles rather bewildered and wondering if she were displeased at the warm personal interest that he had expressed in her family and herself. But he was not kept long in suspense, for a moment later she returned and handed him a photograph of herself in evening dress, which he recognized at once as the original of his half-tone of her as a débutante. Receiving this with the emotions of a novitiate at his consecration, Ruggles's suddenly dimmed eyes discovered that it was inscribed: "To Mr. Ruggles — with the best wishes of Ruth Downing."

"That was Dick's picture," said Ruth, with a breathless little laugh. "But it's yours now. He went off and forgot it, so he deserves to lose it. I don't carry them in stock." She laughed again.

Ruggles could scarcely trust himself to speak.

"There's no danger of my ever going off and forgetting it," said he, almost inaudibly. "Thank you — ever so much. I guess I won't worry much about — about all that I've been telling you — now that I've got this. You've helped me more than — more than anybody else ever did, Miss Downing. I'd better go, now —"

"Wait a minute," said Ruth. "I'll wrap it up for you."

She disappeared again, to return immediately with a piece of wrapping-paper in which she hastily enveloped the portrait and handed it to Ruggles, who took it like one in a trance.

"Good-bye, Miss Downing," said he.

Ruth gave him her hand. "Don't forget to let me know how you succeed," she said. "We're leaving to-morrow after lunch for London and Liverpool. Good-bye and good luck, Mr. Ruggles."

Ruggles walked back to Passy with the rhythmic step and glazed eyes of a somnambulist. He did not awake from his trance until his buxom Swiss landlady handed him a letter with an apologetic smile.

"It came this morning, Mr. Ruggles," said she, "but Josef was careless and slipped it under the

door of our new boarder. He does not get up until noon, so the error was not discovered."

Ruggles thanked her and took the letter, and as he glanced at the heading of the envelope, his heart, already sorely taxed, gave a sudden bound. Here, at last, were the long expected official orders to go to Vienna and take command of the new store. What a pity, he thought, that Josef had been so careless! With this letter in his pocket, how much better equipped he would have been to talk to Miss Challand and Darthea. But, after all, it was not the fault of the company. The company had done its part and backed up his claims as he had known all the time that the company would. "'Put not your faith in princes' and other nobility," Ruggles thought, "but put it in the Walkeasy Shoe Company and you can't go wrong."

He hurried to his room and, standing with his back to the last rays of the autumn sunset, tore open the envelope and read as follows: —

MR. RICHARD P. RUGGLES,
Walkeasy Shoe Company, Paris, France.

DEAR SIR: — We regret to inform you that we find ourselves unable to offer you the managership of the new branch store of the Walkeasy Shoe Company at Vienna.

For such an appointment, we find it preferable to assign, when possible, a person thoroughly conversant with the business methods and language of the country in which the store is situated. Inasmuch as Mr. Max Lorenz, recently employed in the Paris store, appears to possess the necessary requirements, besides having been

formerly employed in a rival establishment, and being therefore well acquainted with the trade, it has been found preferable to appoint him as manager of the new Vienna branch.

We assure you that your application will remain open to our consideration, and, no doubt, in the event of another European branch store being established at a later date, we may be able to offer you the desired opportunity,

Yours very truly,

B. F. HASTINGS,

European General Manager W. S. Co.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE are times in the lives of most of us when the whole universe appears to become one big, cruel, practical joke, of which we are the helpless, undeserving victims.

So it seemed now to Ruggles. He had worked honestly and faithfully for the Walkeasy Shoe Company, giving it his most earnest efforts and trying to prepare himself to serve its interests in a broader capacity. What had been the result? Not only had the company failed to give him the reward which he felt to be his due, but, what was far worse, it seemed to Ruggles that it had been guilty of broken faith. It had given him its assurance that his services were soon to be recognized according to their merits, then preferred above his head a man who had been in its employ for less than four months, and whom Ruggles, in spite of his natural modesty, was convinced had not the half of his own ability and knowledge of the business. What had Lorenz ever done for the Walkeasy Shoe Company? What had his father ever done before him? Lorenz was an indifferent salesman, rather slow and sometimes none too patient with undecided or difficult customers, apt to be irritable or taciturn with his fellow employees, and, as he had proved himself in his relations to Ruggles, treacherous and dishonest.

For Ruggles was naturally convinced that Lorenz had taken advantage of his early confidence to go to work deliberately to get his promotion away from him. Lorenz would probably never have thought of trying for the managership of the Vienna branch had he not learned from Ruggles of the ready response to his application. Thereafter, Lorenz had been working quietly for his own preferment, advancing his claims of capacity as a native of Vienna and a man thoroughly acquainted from previous experience with the retail shoe trade of that city. Ruggles thought of Lorenz's recent absence. Without doubt he had gone to London to advance his application in person to the general manager, who had his headquarters there, for the Walkeasy Shoe Company had stores in most of the leading cities of the British Isles.

But that which ate like acid into Ruggles's soul was the fact that the company should not have given him due notice that his own claims were being contested. The company had not played fair, and for Ruggles to feel that the company had not played fair was akin to the conviction of an ardent patriot that his country had betrayed him. To feel that the Walkeasy Shoe Company could have been guilty of broken faith was outrageous, almost sacrilegious, yet how could its act be regarded otherwise? The action which it had taken in this matter seemed to Ruggles to be deceitful, paltry, and un-American. Lorenz, that big, gaunt, saturnine

sneak, who would rather torture a mouse than sell a pair of shoes, had been promoted over his head, merely because he had certain affiliations (and these, no doubt, malodorous, if the truth were known) in the city where the branch store was to be established.

Ruggles's first emotion, after the primary shock had passed, was a profound sense of injury, not directed against Lorenz or even in fact against the company, but against his shattered ideals. His next thought was of what this disappointment meant to him as concerned the present conditions of his life. He was still no more than he had ever been — an insignificant little shoe clerk, the limit of whose importance in the social scheme of things was to unlace and remove muddy shoes from feet not always tidy, and to smile ingratiatingly up into the faces of the proletariat.

For the first time in his life he was seized with a loathing of his occupation. Darthea was right; Miss Challand was right; Ruth was right. It was a rotten, humiliating job! He wondered that he had never seen it in this way before. It did not occur to him that he had not done so because he had always regarded the business in its larger light — as a great commercial affair of which he was a humble but necessary unit. A private soldier, an orderly, cleaning the boots of his superior on active service, does not think of himself as a valet; he thinks of himself as a soldier. In currying a horse,

he does not think of himself as a groom; he thinks of himself as a soldier, and his self-respect is not impaired. Ruggles had thought of himself as a soldier, a private in the invading army of American trade. He was not the servant of the public to whom he sold shoes; he was not the servant of the great industrial organization which was destined to carry its country's flag to where East becomes West and West East. He was nobody's servant. He was an enlisted man in the great army of American commerce and as such entitled to his chevrons.

It never entered Ruggles's head to go to Ruth in his distress. Neither did he seriously consider an appeal to Mr. Downing. A private soldier with a sense of wrong might look to his colonel for redress, but he would scarcely think of trying to carry the matter to his king or president or minister or secretary of war. Had Dick Downing been in Europe, Ruggles might have turned to him for counsel, but Dick was in America. However, that was not the point. Ruggles did not want the benefit of personal influence from the seats of the mighty. He wanted merely a square deal from the company as the company. He considered his relations with the Downings — especially after his call on Ruth — as social rather than professional, so far as his humble part was concerned. He wanted no crumbs falling from the tables of the rich. All he wanted was *a square deal!*

It is possible that if Ruggles had not gone to

Ruth for advice in regard to his personal affairs, he might have taken his grievance in both hands and shown it to Mr. Downing, Senior, in which case it is most probable that his wrongs would have been investigated and justice done. Mr. Downing had lost his health in the examining of just such conditions, and was cheerfully prepared to die in the same harness. But Ruggles could not do that. Mr. Downing was Mr. Downing, the president of the company and a great man, but the company that he administered was far greater than he, just as a nation is always far greater than its chief executive. It was the company that was responsible to him for the injustice done; not Mr. Downing or Ruth or Dick. The Downings had done their best to make the company a good, honest company, to employees as well as clients, and if they had failed it was not their fault, but that of their unworthy stewards. Ruggles felt that his quarrel was not with the Downings, but with the company, and he was prepared to fight it out as such. He felt that the Downings had been deceived in their organization as much as he.

To go to Ruth or Mr. Downing for restitution was quite impossible. It smacked too much of boot-licking, and while Ruggles was willing and ready to do almost anything with a pair of boots, he drew the line at the licking process. Besides, after the help and comfort which Ruth had rendered him, Ruggles could not bear to show up to her the company in its hollow falsity.

It seemed to Ruggles that he had given his allegiance to an octopus, a merciless, man-grinding machine of which the human toilers were mere cogs to be worn ragged and flung on to the scrap-heap. There was his father, whose machines had earned millions for the company, and who had never received over two hundred dollars a month. Damn the company! Curse the company! Ruggles grabbed up his hat and rushed out.

Forgetting his dinner, he wandered the streets aimlessly until ten o'clock, then went back to his room and to bed. He would work no longer for any greedy, soulless, treacherous combination of liars which could so treat a man! He determined to throw up his job the following day, draw the three thousand and odd francs which represented the savings of many years and which was deposited in a French bank, then take the first steamer for New York, where he would hunt up some work of an entirely different character.

Ruggles, in spite of his youth and glowing health, slept badly that night. His dreams were ugly and confused. He thought that Lorenz, with the face of a rat (suggested perhaps by the mouse episode), was leaning over his bed and trying to gnaw his feet. He struck at him in his sleep and knocked over his *table-de-nuit*. About dawn he fell into a heavy, sluggish sleep and did not awake until nine o'clock. Then he got up, took his sponge-bath, dressed with care, and walked slowly down into

Paris. Before going to the store, he called at the bank, drew out his balance, and told the cashier that he was going away.

His mood had changed in the last few hours, and he found himself, instead of being sad, in a state of savage, smouldering resentment. It had occurred to him that, besides Lorenz, the manager of the store, whom he had always considered a good friend, had acted treacherously. He must have known what Lorenz was up to, but he had failed to put Ruggles on his guard. Ruggles decided to tell Durand what he thought of him. He felt that he would enjoy an interview with Lorenz, also, but reflected that the Austrian had probably left Paris for Vienna. His packing of the morning before would indicate immediate departure. This also explained his surly, inhospitable conduct. Ruggles reflected that Lorenz had felt that he had served him a dirty trick and was on the defensive.

"I'd like to meet him out on the road somewheres," said Ruggles to himself. "He may be twice my size, but I'll bet I could give him something besides shoes to think about for a couple of days. And that darn Durand, too."

In this opinion Ruggles was quite correct. Of stature he was perhaps a little beneath the medium size, but clean living and exercise had developed a frame which was solid of bone and muscle. He was also a very useful man with his fists, having gone in for boxing when living in New York, where he had

belonged to the Y.M.C.A. and practiced nightly in the gymnasium.

It was about ten o'clock when he entered the store, where the first person on whom his eyes happened to fall was the young English surgeon of the British Red Cross whom he had met the previous morning on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and who was in the act of purchasing a pair of high hunting-boots. He did not see Ruggles, who, not wishing to disturb him, passed to the other side of the store, where he came upon the manager and Lorenz, standing at the door of the office engaged in conversation.

Ruggles's eyes, red-rimmed from lack of sleep, blazed up at the sight, and he could feel the blood pumping into his head. His mouth seemed suddenly to become hot and dry and his muscles to tighten. He had no desire to make a scene, especially as there was a fair sprinkling of customers in the place for that early hour, and his years of training had made polite shop manners almost a second nature with him. But the sight of these two men who had so traitorously used him awakened in his system some quality long latent, and which now came boiling up and imperiously demanding expression.

Durand caught sight of Ruggles as he approached. Perhaps at the same time he saw trouble in the congested eyes, for the pink color faded from his sleek face. But he looked at Ruggles with cold disapproval.

"Why are you so late?" he demanded, in his excellent English. "We have had some customers who have been kept waiting."

"Oh, have you?" Ruggles answered. "Then what's the matter with Lorenz waiting on them?" And he glared belligerently at his enemy, whose saturnine face had become suddenly venomous. It suggested, in fact, the face of a rat, a large, combative, cornered rat, and his beady eyes glittered. Ruggles recalled his dream, which did not go far to help the situation.

"Mr. Lorenz is going away," said Durand. "He is going to Vienna to take the managership of our new store, which is to open this week."

"Oh, is he?" Ruggles's voice was ominously calm. "I guess that must be the job that was promised to me. How did the company happen to give it to Lorenz?"

The Austrian stepped forward, his eyes dancing with malicious triumph. He was half a head taller than Ruggles, broad of shoulder and long of limb.

"They gafe it to me because there was nobody so fit to take it," he snapped.

"Then the company must be in a mighty bad fix," said Ruggles contemptuously, and turned to the manager. "I just dropped in to tell you what I thought of you," said he, and his voice, though not loud, had a suppressed intensity that carried to every corner of the store, the words being distinctly audible.

Clerks serving customers stopped plying their shoe-horns and looked up, startled. The bookkeeper ceased his entries and the cashier rummaging among his change. Customers twisted about in their chairs, among them the British surgeon who instantly recognized Ruggles as the nicely spoken young chap who had given him the newspaper the previous morning. Ruggles, in his cold, contemptuous anger, did not observe the effect he was producing. Without raising his voice, he went on speaking, his blue eyes, now almost black from restrained anger, fastened intently on the soft brown ones of the manager, who had turned suddenly very white.

"You knew that I was trying for this Vienna job, Durand," said he, "and you promised to help me get it, did n't you?"

"Come," said the manager, his voice trembling, for the look in Ruggles's face frightened him, "we will not discuss that now."

"Yes, we will, though," Ruggles answered. "You endorsed my letter to the European general manager and promised to help me all you could. Then, like a fool, I told Lorenz what I was after —"

"That is it," Lorenz interrupted with a scowl. "You played the fool. You have only yourself to thank."

Ruggles's blond head turned quickly on his straight shoulders, and he looked through narrowed lids at the scowling Austrian.

"I'll talk to you in a minute, Lorenz," said he. "I 've got a few words to say to Durand first. You lied to me," he went on to the manager, who was struggling hard for his self-possession. "You lied to me like a dirty sneak, and you know it. You kept me in the dark about what was going on, and backed Lorenz for all you were worth. What did you get for it, anyhow?"

"I will not listen to you!" spluttered Durand. "You have been drinking —"

"You're a liar. You know I never touch a drop. You're a stinking, sneaking liar, that's what you are. A man that would play a trick like you have ain't fit to sell sabots to a street cleaner. That's what I think about you. And Lorenz, here, is right in your class."

Durand's face was chalky, but over that of the Austrian there spread a swarthy flush. He had some bitter Hungarian blood in his veins and, though cruel and treacherous, he was no coward. Besides, his nature was such that having betrayed Ruggles's confidence he hated and despised him for it.

"You have said enough," he growled. "Go out and do not make a scene. You have got only what you deserve. While you were loafing ar'round Paris and riding your bicycle and walking in the Bois with your girl, I was writing to prominent business men in Vienna who would recommend me for this position."

Ruggles felt the hair bristling at the nape of his neck, and his fists clenched involuntarily. His blue eyes blazed at Lorenz.

"Oh, you were, were you?" said he. "Why, you piker, who'd give you a recommendation, I'd like to know? You told me yourself that you'd been a quack corn-doctor and got run out of town for nearly killing somebody from blood-poison, then rounded on your boss and swore it was the shoes. When the company gets down so low as to stick in a cheap skate like you for a manager, it's time for the honest men in the concern to hunt new jobs."

Ruggles's voice held more scorn and bitterness than anger. He despised Lorenz too thoroughly to feel any violent rage at the man. But his scathing reference to the unfortunate experiment in chiropody was more than the savage, underlying nature of the Austrian could endure. His face turned almost black.

"You dirty little Yankee pig," snarled Lorenz, quite forgetting in his fury the nationality of the business which had employed him, "get out of this shop." And trusting to the supremacy of some forty pounds of bone and muscle over Ruggles's weight, he seized the boy so fiercely by the right arm near the shoulder that his strong, bony fingers sank almost to the bone.

A snarl burst from Ruggles's throat, for the pain was sudden and intense. The next instant it seemed to Lorenz as though a wiry mountain mule had

planted his hind hoof directly under his left ear. He loosed his grip and spun around on his heels; then, before he could recover his balance — *smash!* — and the other hoof had been planted in the cavernous socket of his right eye. Backward he went, smashing one of the company's nice new Art-Nouveau chairs in his fall. He scrambled to his feet and, glimpsing Ruggles through a swirling haze, rushed blindly at him with the mad intention of bearing him down by sheer superiority of size and rendering him limb from limb. But Ruggles, though all aflame with the exhilaration of the first violence of his hitherto peaceful life, stuck strictly to the instincts of his Anglo-Saxon blood, and, as Lorenz flung his big, gaunt body upon him, he sidestepped and planted a vicious blow in the other eye. Then, the momentum of his antagonist being partly checked, he leaped nimbly in and delivered so neat an uppercut on the pointed Magyar chin that Lorenz lost the tip of his tongue and spent many subsequent hours in a dental parlor.

That finished the fight, so far as Lorenz was concerned, for he sank limply to the floor, where mingled strains of Austrian and Magyar blood made an unsightly stain on the company's handsome carpet. It might have finished the fight for Ruggles, also, and resulted in his being swiftly conducted to the police station by three or four *agents de police*, had not Durand lost his head. Excited beyond thought or reason by the shocking

scene that had arisen in his polite shoe parlor, he hurled himself upon Ruggles, who received him almost with love. Durand had no distinct idea of what he meant to do, but there was no doubt in Ruggles's mind as to his own intentions in regard to Durand. He gave him a straight jab where nose and forehead meet, and another chair was added to the list of casualties.

At this, the cashier, to whose horror-stricken eyes it seemed as if a god had been smitten in his presence, leaped from his desk, upsetting his ink-pot over the ledger, capsized the bookkeeper in his passage, and dashed through his door like a falcon unhooded. Ruggles saw him coming, met him just outside the threshold, and sent him back into his coop, door and all, where he fell across the type-writer, adding this and a large pane of Art-Nouveau glass with a beautiful design of lotus flowers to the profit-and-loss account of the company.

By this, the spirit of strife having taken charge of Ruggles's awakened soul, his blazing eyes darted this way and that, searching out the next candidate for belligerent honors. They fell upon the manager Durand, who had struggled to his feet. There was nothing bellicose in the bearing of Durand, but Ruggles was now too far amuck to discriminate, and started for him. Durand did not await the on-slaught. With wonderful dexterity for a corpulent young man whose nose had been broken and eyes badly strained, he leaped over the legs of a semi-

paralyzed customer, hurled a stool, and darted around the double row of chairs, with Ruggles in swift pursuit. They made the complete circuit, and then Ruggles doubled craftily. But Durand was not to be caught napping, and the chase reversed itself. The corpulent Durand, light on his feet as a dancing-master, gained the foot of the stairs leading up to the ladies' department. Ruggles pursued him halfway up, then, catching sight of a swooning saleswoman at the head of the stairs, he descended slowly, glaring up from the foot like a terrier who has treed a cat. He was panting hard, but his head was beginning to clear a little.

It was during this instant of pause that the door swung open and Ruth Downing entered. Ruggles did not see her, but she saw Ruggles, and at sight of his wild face, bloodshot eyes, and bleeding knuckles, she stepped back with a little gasp of dismay. Her startled eyes fell upon the wreckage, and her ears were greeted by hysterical cries from the rear of the shop and the top of the stairs. The much bebuttoned little page who officiated as St. Peter to the Walkeasy Elysium, and who alone of all the personnel had stood fast, unforgetful of the responsibilities of his position, steered her gently into a quiet corner.

"Pardon, madame, on se bat" [there's been a fight], said he politely.

Ruth did not attempt to contradict him. The shop gave every evidence of a battle royal with

Ruggles as the prime mover. In the rush of her final shopping she had taken time to drop into the store to tell Ruggles that, on talking to her father, she had heard of the appointment of an Austrian to the management of the Vienna branch, but that Mr. Downing had promised her that Ruggles should have the same position in a much more elaborate store to be opened very shortly in Rome. It is unnecessary to say what means Ruth had employed to extract this promise, but she had achieved it; and she had sacrificed an hour of very precious time for the sole purpose of being the harbinger of these glad tidings.

Consequently, she was considerably taken aback by the spectacle presented to her vision. As she stood there, dazed and astonished, she saw a handsome man of a distinguished air rise quietly from his chair and lay his hand on Ruggles's shoulder. Ruggles appeared to recognize him, for he turned quickly with clenched fist, ready to strike, then let his arm fall, with a gasp that was half a sob.

"Come, old chap," said the stranger soothingly. "You've done quite enough damage. Chuck it now and come with me. I've got a taxi waiting."

He steered Ruggles through the open door, which was swung wide by the small page.

CHAPTER IX

"CAFÉ DE MADRID—et marchez vite," said Ruggles's friend, and slammed the door of the taxi behind him.

Ruggles sat staring straight in front of him until they had crossed the Place de la Concorde. Then he suddenly dropped his face into his hands. The doctor reached into his side pocket, drew out a well-seasoned pipe, which he stuffed from his tobacco-pouch, and, leaning back in his seat, smoked tranquilly. He did not so much as glance at Ruggles as they spun up the Champs Élysées.

Ruggles got himself in hand before the Étoile was reached. He mopped his face with his handkerchief and turned to look at his companion.

"Say, doctor," said Ruggles, "why did you do that?"

"Haul you out of the mess? Because I heard the whole thing and liked your methods, old chap. That German brute forced it on you. He had it over you a good three stone, too. You *did* give him pepper! And those other cads, too!" He chuckled. "I went out to Auteuil yesterday, but I did n't see any such jumping as that fat Johnny did when you were chivyin' him around the chairs! You're pretty useful in a scrap, are n't you?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Ruggles wearily. "Say,

doctor, when I went in there, the last thing in my mind was a rough-house. But I just could n't help telling those two just what I thought of 'em. They'd done me dirt."

"I gathered that from the conversation," answered the doctor. "Don't take it too much to heart. You've got jolly well square, and men like that are n't fit to work for. What a bee-utiful row it was, anyhow!" He laughed.

But it was no laughing matter for Ruggles. He felt as crushed as might a novice who in a fit of madness had defiled the temple and trampled sacred emblems. He had made a wreck of the company's glittering store (and some of its servitors), and even though the company had been guilty of bad faith, still, the company was the company, entitled to the respect of its dignity as such.

He took no satisfaction in the devastation which he had wrought. As a matter of fact, he had no very clear recollection of just what had happened after Lorenz's aquiline talons had sunk into the flesh of his upper arm. He remembered having knocked Lorenz down, and was not disposed to grieve greatly over this, though he wished that it might have happened in the street. But first to maul and then to chase the pulpy Durand round and round the chairs and up into the ladies' department was nothing short of ruffianly and Ruggles's blond head was bowed with shame at the recollection.

He decided that beneath his polite exterior he must be possessed of the soul of an *Apache*. What would Ruth think when she heard of his violence? What would Dick and Mr. Downing think — and Darthea and Miss Challand and Mr. Falconer (an elderly retired English clergyman whom Ruggles had frequently met at Darthea's and who had shown him great consideration), and the rector of the English Church and other friends and acquaintances who had always regarded him as an eminently respectable and gentlemanly person? It would all be in the papers, no doubt, and he would very probably be arrested on a charge of assault preferred by Durand and publicly disgraced before a tribunal. Darthea was right. She had not considered that a person of his position was a fit associate — and the train of circumstances appeared to show that Darthea's estimate was accurate. Ruggles felt than he had acted like what he would have called a "thug," and that he was no longer entitled to the respect of any decent person, least of all, himself.

Consequently, he was a good deal surprised when this kind-hearted young Englishman, who had come to his rescue at the critical moment, pulled his pipe from his mouth and said briefly:—

"I know just how you feel. I felt the same way once, after I'd lost my temper in a shop on the Strand and chucked everything out of the windows. Only I had n't half your excuse. I saw red merely

because they gave me some cheek. I chased the shopkeeper into the cellar: made an awful ass of myself. All the same, I never regretted it. The beggars need a straightening out, once in a time."

Ruggles nodded, rather absently. He was quite appreciative of the kindness which had been done him, but was inclined to feel that, after all, he would have preferred to be left to face the music and take the consequences of his act, instead of being whisked away like a pickpocket or sandbagger with an accomplice waiting in a taxi at the corner. He could not help liking his friend and feeling grateful to him, but at the same time he was inclined to distrust such disinterested kindness. Why should this fellow have dragged him out of the store, crammed him into a taxi, and raced off with him? Why should he care whether he was arrested or not? Sharing the end of a bench and giving him a newspaper with which he was finished was hardly enough to account for such gratuitous aid. Ruggles felt forced to admit to himself that his friend in need, for all of his charm, must be a rather tough sort of fellow, who had warmed to him because he had enjoyed his performance in the shop and also because he felt rather lonely and wanted a little excitement. Glancing at the Englishman's hands, he observed that they were hard and roughened as if from sun or some caustic agent. His face, too, was weather-beaten; the sort of face one would expect to find on

a cowboy rather than on a surgeon of the Red Cross. Ruggles decided to render his friend all due thanks and escape from his guardianship as soon as possible. The Englishman's confession of having assaulted a London shopkeeper seemed to indicate him as a rather unruly person, and at the moment there was no individual type which could possibly have had less charm for Ruggles. The man was, no doubt, all right, and not a bad fellow, and he was certainly under obligation to him for having extricated him from a nasty situation. But, after all, there was never much good in chance acquaintances when they got too friendly, and Ruggles decided that the best thing for him to do would be to express his obligation and say good-bye as soon as possible. He began to have his doubts whether his friend was what he represented. Had he been, he would scarcely have bothered himself about Ruggles. Nobody had ever done so before unless he had an axe to grind — and Ruggles suddenly bethought himself of the considerable sum of money reposing in his breast-pocket.

"Say," he asked, "where are we going, anyhow?"

The doctor smiled. "I thought we'd go out to the Madrid and get a bite," said he. "I lunched there yesterday, and they gave me some chow that was n't half bad."

Ruggles's worst suspicions were confirmed. He knew the Madrid as one of the fashionable restaurants of the city. Why should a stranger ask him to

lunch at the Madrid? There must be something behind it all.

"I think I 'd rather get out here and go back to where I live, if you don't mind," said he. "I'm not feeling very good."

The doctor smiled. "If I'm any judge of symptoms," said he, "your chief trouble at just this moment is hunger. This thing has got on your nerves, and you've not been eating as you ought — what?"

"Oh, I was never much of an eater," Ruggles answered uneasily.

"Yes, you are. Any man that can hit out as you can is a good eater. Come, now, you're my guest, of course — and we're almost there."

Ruggles did not have the force to protest further. Besides, as the doctor said, they had almost arrived. The taxi turned into the gardens of the café and halted, and Ruggles stepped out after his host. The first person on whom his eyes fell was Mr. Falconer, who was in the act of giving some directions to his chauffeur, his car having entered directly before that of Ruggles and his host.

Mr. Falconer was with a friend, a gentleman whose years approached his own. Ruggles hoped that he might escape without recognition, considering the fact that he had just come from having disgraced himself and was in the company of a man whose name he did not know, but who was, as Ruggles was becoming more and more convinced,

not at all what he represented himself. A doctor, Ruggles had thought, as they had spun uptown in the taxi, would have been prompt to offer his services to Lorenz, who, as far as he was able to recall, had appeared to be in a very serious condition. A doctor of the British Red Cross, particularly, would scarcely have assisted a stranger in escaping justice. No, the man, for all of his charm, was very obviously a fraud.

But Mr. Falconer's keen eyes had already caught sight of Ruggles, for Mr. Falconer had a lifelong habit of looking at a great many people almost at the same time and remembering their names. Then as his quick glance rested on Ruggles's companion, his genial face broke into smiles and he came forward with outstretched hand.

"Pembroke, my dear fellow!" said he, "this is indeed a pleasure! And Mr. Ruggles — delighted to see you." He turned to his friend. "Sir Henry, perhaps you have already met Lord Pembroke, who is on his way out to the Porte under the auspices of the Red Cross. And this is Mr. Ruggles, Sir Henry Stafford," said he, beaming at Ruggles and wondering inwardly how in the name of all that was conventional he happened to be lunching at the Madrid with John Willoughby, seventh Earl of Pembroke.

Ruggles was not required to say much, which was fortunate for Ruggles. Lord Pembroke made a few pleasant remarks, and then they separated to find

their tables. Ruggles followed his host, his head in a whirl.

"*Lord* Pembroke!" he muttered to himself. "Gee!"

"Better have a wash and brush up," said Pembroke. "You skinned your knuckles on the big blighter. I must say, though, you got out of it awfully well. The last row I was in, I managed to swim clear, somehow, but I was n't pretty to look at for a few days. That was out in Sydney. I've been in Australia for the last ten years. Only came back to inherit when my older brother died a few months ago." He thrust his strong hands under the faucet for a moment, then picked up a towel. "So you know old Falconer? Nice old bird! Got me out of lots of scrapes when I was a nipper. He was our vicar. Then his uncle died and left him a pot of money. Glad of it."

"He's certainly a fine old gentleman," Ruggles answered.

"Well," said Pembroke, "come out in the garden as soon as you're ready. I'll go order our chow."

He went out, and Ruggles stood for a moment staring into the glass.

"Lord Pembroke — *Lord* Pembroke!" he repeated to himself. "And I was beginning to think he might be some sort of a con man! Golly!"

It swept over Ruggles that he was still very callow and inexperienced in regard to this world and the people in it. Also, he began to wonder if

all men were as free and equal as his American principles had led him to maintain. Up to this time he had never been able to understand why he should not consider himself as good as anybody else, and now for the first time it occurred to him that perhaps he had taken far too much for granted.

The Downings were his superiors, and so were Darthea and her aunt and Mr. Falconer and Pembroke. The rectors of the American and English churches were also of this higher order, to which it now seemed to Ruggles, in his reaction, that he could never hope to attain.

"I guess I'm just a cheap little skate and never found it out," thought he bitterly. "Where did I get my license to trot around with Darthea and Miss Challand, and to call on Ruth Downing and bother her with my hurt feelings, and now to be eating here at the Madrid with Lord Pembroke? They're all swells — the real thing — and I'm nothing but a cheap little squirt of a shoe clerk. Well, I've got my goods. None of 'em will ever be bothered by Dicky Ruggles again. I'll go back to the States and hunt me up a job as chauffeur or bicycle cop or something that's more in my line. Whatever it is, it won't be selling shoes."

It was in this chastened mood that he rejoined his host, who was seated at a table in the garden, cheerfully engaged in ordering their repast. Ruggles declined the offer of a cocktail, but when the hors d'œuvres were served, he quickly discovered

how badly he was in need of food. A fillet of sole, followed by a juicy steak, went far toward restoring him to his normal self. Pembroke was hungry, too, and neither had much to say until the coffee was served. Then Pembroke lighted a cigar, leaned back in his chair, and, looking at Ruggles, whose execution of the delicious luncheon he had been observing with kindly approval, asked with a smile: —

"Feeling better, old chap?"

"I sure am," Ruggles answered. "I guess I was hungrier than I thought. You see, I've had a lot of things bothering me for the last couple of days and I have n't thought much about eating."

"So I imagined," Pembroke answered. "You looked pretty well gone. Do you think they'll try to make it nasty for you down there?"

Ruggles shook his head. "I don't believe so," he answered. "Lorenz might, but he's got to go to Vienna to-day. Durand, the manager, will probably try to hush the thing up, if only for his own sake. I'm sorry it happened, but when that skunk Lorenz grabbed me by the arm I saw red. Then Durand had to butt in, and Wagner, the cashier, so I just sailed in to clean out the whole darn bunch."

Pembroke chuckled. "I must say you made a ripping thorough job of it," said he. "Since it had to be I would n't have missed it for anything. That right hook you put on the jaw of the German gentleman was a proper knock-out if he had n't been

such a bony brute. And you stopped him beautifully when he came back. Oh, it was a lovely scrap." He leaned back and laughed, then looked at Ruggles, who was sipping his coffee and taking no apparent pleasure in this sort of praise. "What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know," Ruggles answered slowly. "I've got a little money saved up and I thought I might go back to N' York, and hunt up some sort of a job. I've got enough of this town. You see, it's not only losing my job," he went on, with a rather heightened color, "but only the day before, I got turned down by a girl I thought a whole lot about."

"No, really? I say, that *is* tough! What was the trouble, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I'd sure like to tell you about it," said Ruggles. "You've been so mighty kind to me, and I hate to have you think that I'm just a common roughhouser. But it's a long story, and as you're leaving to-night, you must have a lot of things you want to do and see."

Pembroke glanced at his watch. "I've got an hour yet," said he. "Tell me all about it. I might be able to help you. We medicos are often able to give advice that is n't purely physical."

Ruggles looked gratefully at the kindly, interested face of his host. It struck him that Pembroke was a considerably older man than he had at first thought. The fresh but rugged skin had certain lines of experience, and the crisp chestnut hair

which curled above the small, closely set ears was flecked with gray. Ruggles decided that his host must be nearer forty than thirty. A sudden curiosity possessed him to know more of this strong, kindly man.

"What is it?" asked Pembroke, noting the look of inquiry.

Ruggles colored. "I was just thinking," said he, "that it seems sort of funny that you should be a doctor when you're an English lord."

"That's easily explained. You see, in England the oldest son inherits after the death of the father. When my father died, my elder brother inherited the title and the estates. Rather than rot around at home, I went out to Australia and scratched for myself. I had a sheep ranch for a while, then tried gold digging, and finally went down to Melbourne and studied medicine. Surgery had always interested me, so I went in for that, and I had quite a decent little practice (he did not see fit to mention that he was the leading surgeon of the city) when my brother died. Now I'm going out for the Red Cross, and unless I'm much mistaken, there'll be a lot of work to do, once they get at it in real earnest. But about this affair of yours —?"

Ruggles finished his coffee and set down the cup.

"Well," said he, "it was like this, Lord —"

"Call me 'doctor,'" said Pembroke. "I like it better. You see, anybody might become a peer by virtue of birth or circumstance or because of — oh,

a lot of things. But a man has to make himself a surgeon."

"Well, then," said Ruggles, "it was like this." And in his simple, frank, and often slangy manner of speaking, he proceeded to put Pembroke in possession of all the facts connected with his unfortunate affair. Pembroke lighted a fresh cigar and leaned back in his chair to listen. He was a man who loved his fellow men, loved to help and direct them, and his experience of human nature in the raw as well as in the finished product was considerable. He was the more eminently fitted to grasp the situation because the social conditions of life in Australia so closely approach those of the United States in many ways.

It did not take Ruggles long to tell his story, scarcely a quarter of an hour, in fact; the more so as he had so little to say about himself. Pembroke observed this trait in him with particular appreciation, realizing its rarity. Ruggles finished his narrative and looked hopefully at Pembroke.

"It's sort of funny," said Ruggles, "how much good it seems to do a fellow to get a thing like this off his chest. Say, doctor," — he remembered Pembroke's admonition and it put him much more at his ease. He had not been quite sure about the proper form of address in speaking to a British peer and whether politeness required that he should say, "Lord," "my lord," "your lordship," or just what. "I haven't got this thing quite doped yet, but it sort

of seems to me as if I'd made a darn fool of myself from the very start. Why, doctor, when you come to think of it, these people that I've been flocking with are way up out of my class. Now that I'm beginning to see it that way, it ain't so hard. I did n't understand, that's all."

Pembroke blew out a column of smoke and regarded him thoughtfully.

"No," he admitted, "you were n't precisely in the same class, from the European point of view. I happen to know something about the family. This Miss Challand must be one of the Norfolk Challands; all poor as Job, or Lazarus — or whoever it was that was so rotten poor — and proud as Lucifer. The Westbrookes are an old county family, too. Chuck it all. That's my advice to you."

But Ruggles scarcely heard this admonition, for he was in the grip of a sudden inspiration that had fallen upon him like a bolt from the blue. It was a wonderful thought and inspired by the disinterested kindness which had been so spontaneously offered him in his hour of need. Many a homeless and ill-treated dog has been similarly inspired by sympathy from the casual pedestrian; and it has happened that the dog has followed its protector home and later laid down its life in defense of the family or goods of the one to whom its allegiance has been offered. Ruggles leaned forward, his eyes bright and a flush on his lean cheeks.

"Say, doctor, you're going out there to the Bal-

kans to work for the Red Cross. Can't you take me with you? I don't know anything about the job, but I'd manage to make good."

Pembroke took his cigar from his lips, and his keen eyes first examined the eager blue ones looking into his, then ran over Ruggles's trim, well-made figure, lastly resting on the boy's flushed, earnest face. What he saw appeared to please him, but he hesitated a moment before answering.

"Our corps — or at least my unit of it — is full," said he slowly. "There's not a vacancy left." Then, seeing the cloud of disappointment that this statement produced, he added reflectively: "Still, it might be managed somehow, if you really want it so badly. I could take you on as my orderly."

"That for mine!" cried Ruggles.

"There would n't be much in it for you," said Pembroke. "Small pay and a good chance of dying of fever or cholera, or possibly a piece of shrapnel. I fancy I'll be rather in the thick of things."

"You won't have to get out a search-warrant to find me, if you are," Ruggles answered.

"No — considering what I've seen of your methods, I don't believe I would."

"Say, doctor, I don't give a hang about what I draw," said Ruggles eagerly. "I've got a little money, and I'll pay my own way out, if you like. All I want is to get away from here and do something that's worth while."

"There's no trouble about either of those

things," Pembroke answered. "But you see, Ruggles, it would mean that you would be my personal servant. You'd have to look after my things, and turn to at any time at any job that might happen to come along. How does that strike you?"

"Me for *it!*" said Ruggles fervently. "I guess if I can try on shoes all day long for any bum with a little money that comes into the shop, it ain't going to turn my stomach to clean the boots of a man like you that's looking after wounded soldiers."

Pembroke laid down his cigar and leaned back in his chair.

"Well," said he, "in that case you're on. Meet me with your duffle at the Gare de Lyon at nine o'clock to-night."

CHAPTER X

It was a bitter cold night in midwinter, with a fierce gale driving in from the Black Sea. The intense darkness was alternated by periods of vivid light, as the moon cut its way like a silver scimitar through the hurrying masses of snow-filled clouds.

All about the swamps of Derkos and on the ragged line which ran beyond Tschataldscha, the Ottoman army was making its last stand. There were no camp-fires, for there was little to burn and nothing to cook. There was a dearth of everything of which an army stands in need — pure water, food, shelter, clothing, and, worst of all, faith; the last a greater loss to the host of Islam than all the rest.

Plague-stricken corpses rotted in stagnant pools; plague-stricken soldiers, soon to become corpses, wallowed in ditches calling vainly on the Prophet to relieve their distress. To some of these on the outer lines their God sent swift repose in scattering volleys of rifle fire from the opposing trenches when the moon burst from the black, billowing clouds and the flanking heights of the Istrandja Dagh gave a sense of direction to the fire.

Not far behind the outer line was a little Turkish village, where had been stationed a caracol, and here in the crude barracks Pembroke and Ruggles

toiled and labored with the sick and wounded brought in from the firing-line. In this improvised field hospital a few lives had been saved, and from its windows streamed the only light to be seen for miles, barring the bright and warning rays which flashed across the sea from the coast light on Kara Burun, which in peace or war must remain fixed and constant, without reference to the rise or fall of Islam.

An orderly came in, saluted Pembroke, and delivered a verbal message. Pembroke turned to Ruggles.

"The colonel's going to visit the outposts and wants me to go along," said he. "I've got all I can swing to here. Hop on my pony and tell him I sent you in my place. If you see many sick lying about, ask for a detail to bring them to the hospital. Pick out the ones that seem to have some show."

"All right, sir," said Ruggles, and went out into the court, where a shaggy pony was hitched to a blasted pomegranate tree in the shelter of the mud wall. He mounted and rode toward headquarters, where he fell in with Colonel Hamid Pasha and his staff, who were already in the saddle and about to start on their rounds.

"Is that you, Pembroke?" asked the colonel, in excellent English.

"No, sir," answered Ruggles. "It's Doctor Pembroke's orderly. He could n't leave, so he sent me in his place."

"Very well," said the colonel, and gave the order to march.

The little cavalcade turned to face the wintry blast which swept down gusty and freezing cold from the snow-clad steppes. The outposts were visited in turn and the party soon found itself on the extreme left of the line, where the Turkish trenches were less than the distance of a pistol shot from those of the enemy.

The sentries were inspected, and the party was about to withdraw, when the moon, which had been for the last half-hour obscured, bored through the flying cloud mass and blazed down to flash from the bayonets of a dark body of men swarming up the slight declivity toward the Turkish trench. The colonel raised himself in his stirrups.

"Halt!" he cried. "Who goes there?"

It was the first warning of the assault and his challenge came too late. Although the famished and exhausted Turks roused themselves, prepared to defend their position with the stubbornness of their race, their scattering volley was unavailing. The trench stopped the rush no more than a ditch dug in the sand might stop the rush of a breaking wave. It was bayonet work and quickly over, when the enemy poured on up the slope in open order.

For a handful of men like the colonel's staff to try to check that raging flood was impossible, was suicidal. The colonel gave a sharp order to retreat. But even as the words left his mouth, his Arab

reared, plunged, and fell, pinning its rider beneath him. It is possible that Ruggles alone saw this, for the others were already in flight. The Bulgarians were almost upon them, the moonlight was glancing from their bayonets, and their savage cries were rent by the gusty wind, but hampered by their heavy accouterments and ankle-deep in the sandy mud, their progress was slower than it seemed. Ruggles saw, or thought he saw, a forlorn hope of saving Colonel Hamid Pasha.

He flung himself to the ground and, still holding the reins of his pony, he sprang to the side of the old man, who was struggling to free himself. But even as he reached him, the pony screamed, tore itself away, and dashed off into the darkness. Ruggles, light of foot, might have saved himself even then, but some instinct stronger than his fear of death held him fast. He stooped over the colonel, gripped him under the shoulders, and dragged him to his feet.

Though theoretically a noncombatant, Ruggles, like Pembroke, carried a revolver, as amongst the Bulgarians were many who were no respecters of the Red Cross, of which Christian corps, as Ruggles saw it, the agents were in no way bound to suffer martyrdom at the hands of some shaggy swineherd from the heights of the Kopagnik Mountains. So, as the rush bore down upon them, he began to fire.

Beside him, Hamid Pasha drew his sword, and

almost as he did so, the two were in the thick of it. The brilliant moonlight glistened on the silvery head of the old Ottoman as he towered above his squat assailants, and blazed on Ruggles's golden head, as the pair, almost emblematic of East and West, stood side by side desperately defending themselves against the frenzied foresters from the beech woods about the Shipka Pass. The next instant a heavy bank of cloud swept across the face of the moon, and the struggle went on in Stygian darkness.

Presently Hamid Pasha fell, and Ruggles found himself astride his prostrate body, a rifle in his hand, stabbing, parrying, lunging with the bayonet. A madness seemed to have possessed him. He was conscious of neither pain nor fear, though wounded in many places and surrounded by enemies who gave no quarter even to the dying. But it was a thinking, reasoning madness, an ancient inheritance, perhaps, from Berserker ancestors. Strong, supple, quick of thought and action, he raged like a young wolf beset by a pack of clumsy curs, and when presently his bayonet was torn from its fixtures, he gripped the piece by the muzzle and lashed about him like a blond demon.

Then suddenly the moon gashed its way through the black curtain of cloud, and Ruggles saw vaguely that he had to do with but two of his enemies — the one a squat creature muffled to the chin in rags, the other an officer. Screaming with the hope of

despair, he sprang upon the former, struck his weapon aside, and dashed the butt of his rifle into the swart face. And then, as he flung himself upon the other, the moonlight struck upon the face of his antagonist, and Ruggles gave a cry of recognition. It was the Balkan gentleman to whom he had sold a pair of shoes in the Paris store.

"I know *you!*" he roared. "I'll send you where you won't need any bunion stretcher!"

The wavering call of Turkish bugles was borne down pulsating on the flaws of the gusty wind. There came a rattle of rifle fire, cries of "Allah! Allah!" and the rush of many feet. Ruggles did not hear. The moon blazed on his pallid face as he lay unconscious across the body of his late client, the Bulgarian gentleman.

CHAPTER XI

On the sunny terrace of what had formerly been a royal palace on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus, an old man, with snowy hair and beard and a skin the color of antique ivory, reclined upon the silken cushions of his *chaise-longue* and listened with quiet pleasure to the verses of Swinburne which were being read aloud by his companion: —

> "The storm-winds of ages
> Blow through me and cease,
> The war-wind that rages,
> The spring wind of peace —"

There was a delicately perfumed spring wind wafting from Therapia across the Straits, and Colonel Hamid Pasha prayed that it might be fraught with peace. No one glancing at the sere and yellow skin stretched like parchment over the lofty, benevolent features of the old man could doubt but that it would at least bring peace to him, for the coming change was written plainly there, and the dark, luminous eyes held that expression of slightly troubled curiosity sometimes to be seen in the eyes of a dying man or a prospective mother whose hour is upon her. Yet they were serene, for the old Ottoman had been true to his God, his country, and himself, and felt that he had naught to fear.

"Read the 'Super Flumina Babylonis,' my son,"

said he. "I recall a stanza which has frequently been expressed in our poetry: —

"'On the mountains of memory, by the world's wellsprings,
In all men's eyes,
Where the light of the life of him is on all past things,
Death only dies.'"

At his elbow, Ruggles turned the pages of the beautiful copy of Swinburne's "Songs Before Sunrise," which an English friend of Hamid Pasha, who knew the old Ottoman's love of poetry, had sent him from the limited edition. Like his host, Ruggles was propped in his chair with many cushions of silk and embroidery, and rare Bokhara and Rhodes. A crutch lay at his side, and one foot was still enveloped in bandages. Ruggles was never to mount his wheel again, for a Bulgarian bullet had so shattered his ankle that only the skill of Lord Pembroke had prevented amputation, and the young man was destined to limp for the rest of his life. This wound, with three others, he had received in his desperate defense of Colonel Hamid Pasha.

Ruggles found the desired poem and read it slowly in his clear, pleasant voice. It is a rather curious fact that the vocal tones of the Turks are more similar to those of English-speaking people than those of any other nationality. Hamid Pasha, to whom the English and French languages were as familiar as his mother tongue, listened to the reading with quiet pleasure. Ruggles had a natural

RUGGLES AND HAMID PASHA

lingual facility and read with smoothness and expression. These exercises had been for several weeks a pleasant feature of their convalescence. Hamid Pasha's wound was in the liver and still open. Ruggles's had all healed, but Pembroke limited his physical activity.

Ruggles read on. He had developed a love of poetry during his convalescence, and gave to his diction a lilting quality which his kindly host found most harmonious and soothing. Hamid Pasha slept very little, but of recent days he had fallen more and more into the habit of long periods of semi-somnolence, during which his body became numb while his mentality was clear and tranquil. It was the approaching dissolution between the physical and the spiritual, and Hamid Pasha knew it and was glad.

Now, as Ruggles read on, the old Osmanli Turk looked out across the vivid blue of the deep-flowing Bosphorus and thought of many things. No doubt his mind dwelt most upon his religion, which was of the orthodox faith of Islam, but not bigoted, or, when all is said, particularly devout in outward demonstration. He prayed when it pleased him, and where, and the call of a muezzin from a minaret did not always bring him to his knees, for which he had been at times severely censured. Hamid Pasha was a freethinker and a man of the world. He found all religions good, and the lack of any more bestial and stupid than fraught with any

especial danger of hell fire. For him, God was God, and while Mohammed was his prophet, it was quite possible that he might through the ages have found need of other prophets, such as Brahma and Confucius and Zoroaster and Jesus Christ.

Hamid Pasha was childless, and this fact had been the sorrow of his declining years. Earlier in life, he had taken wives in accordance with the laws of the Koran and Ottoman social custom, but these marriages proving unfruitful, he had divorced his womenkind, amply providing for them. He was enormously rich, having inherited estates in Egypt and stock in the Suez Canal. The Egyptian property he had converted into cash, which he had invested, with prodigious subsequent profit, in the oil fields of Batoum, at that time undeveloped. Still later, he had disposed of these holdings and reinvested through his London bankers in British, African, American, and other securities. Oddly enough, he was the holder of large blocks of American industrial stocks.

Hamid Pasha had never been a sensual man, but he was sensuous to the point of æstheticism. His pleasure lay in such things as the sight of his almond trees in full blossom, or the odor of the jasmine which clothed the columns surrounding his Persian fountain, whereof the basin was composed of ancient tiles each of which would have been found worthy of a glass case in the Musée Guimet. Their traceries were partly hidden by delicate moss of a vivid

green, which the gardener was permitted to remove only in certain spots.

Hamid Pasha loved also music, poetry, and the dance. To entertain guests he had sometimes brought gypsy troupes from their *malhallah* in Stamboul. He loved also the musical murmur of the Bosphorus tides, and as a spectacle the mosques and minarets of Stamboul aflame in the summer sunrise with ancient Agia Sophia rearing its bulbous domes above the morning mist like bubbles of gold swelling upward from a caldron of silver. A bite into the heart of a ripe pomegranate crisp and sparkling, or a fish taken from the deep, cold waters of the Bosphorus where it lapped the wall of his estate, marked the extreme of his pleasure as a *gourmet*. Heavy foods he abominated, as he did also alcohol, tobacco, and other noxious poisons, with all forms of gross, physical indulgence.

Keen of intelligence, learned, fearless in battle as a Bashi-Bazouk, gentle in his household, a poet at heart, and a man of deep, broad, fundamental religion — such was Hamid Pasha.

Mindful of this, one may better understand his position in regard to the four lovely girls who at this time inhabited his *haremlik* and whom he had taken as his adopted daughters. The kindly old Ottoman had chosen them with care, and had destined them for better things than the semi-slavery of the orthodox Turkish woman. He had occupied himself with their education, and denied

them nothing which it was good for them to have. Also, he had watched and guarded them with the care of a fond parent, and although they were free to come and go, whether on the Bosphorus, in their lacquered caïque or Hamid Pasha's small steam-yacht, driving in the landau behind the high-mettled horses which were a cross of Arab and Wallachian, shopping in Pera at the Bon Marché — no matter where, they were invariably chaperoned by governess or duenna. They repaid him in affection and the pleasure which he took in their beauty and accomplishments.

Inconceivable as it may seem to the Occidental mind, Hamid Pasha's attitude and relations toward these four charming inmates of his *haremlik* had never been other than that of a kindly and indulgent parent. All were musical, whether vocally or instrumentally. All were trained dancers, and one, a ruddy nymph from Tiflis in Trans-Caucasia, had been trained in the Circassian gesture dance. Hamid Pasha had secured her at a high price from a Crimean merchant of such wares, be it understood with the full approval and consent of her family.

There were also in this coterie a Turkish girl, plump, pretty, and mischievous as a kitten, a girl from eastern Roumelia, who resembled one of the damask roses of which the culture is the principal industry of this region, and a downy-lipped damsel from Crete, whose reigning passion appeared to be

rahat lahkoum (fig paste), usually to be found somewhere about the person of Hamid Pasha when he went in to play with his pets. Before the war he had been wont to spend an hour every evening in the *haremlik*, precisely as a man might go to a theater or *café chantant*, listening to the girls' music, watching their dances, often bestowing little presents. This was his pleasure and repose.

Ruggles read on while Hamid Pasha listened, his eyes resting on the opposite European shore or wandering wearily from one to the other of the brilliant notes of the broad panorama spread before him. Off Galata and the mouth of the Golden Horn was anchored a small fleet of foreign men-of-war and the mellow sunlight flashed from their bright work and played creamily on their multi-colored ensigns. A stream of traffic disturbed the cobalt waters; beyond the sun lay in yellow highlights and mauve shadows on the drab walls against the hill of Pera, while in the farther distance rose the ramparts of the great Yildiz Kiosk, the home of Sultans; at this moment occupied by perhaps the last Padisha to defend the Faith of Islam on its throne in the city of Constantine.

The terrace on which the two men sat was a charming retreat. Masses of wistaria rioted over the ancient walls, and to the right one glimpsed through a vista in the plane trees a flower garden which Hamid Pasha had surrendered to nature, an encroacher on his lordly domain for whom he had

great tolerance. This garden was his favorite retreat when in need of an hour of contemplation, and beyond keeping the path to the central peristyle surrounding an ancient fountain clean and freshly sanded, his gardeners did nothing there. Roses and jasmine, dwelling in sweet accord, hid the Parian marble of the columns and gloried in their wild disorder. At the far end was the fragment of a loggia belonging to a former palace which Hamid Pasha had preserved because of the Byzantine entablature through which the little path led, and where one might part the ivy and discover a beautiful tracery of such mosaic work as may be seen today in the celebrated mosque erected over the body of the very sacred Abu Eyub Khalid Ensari, at Eyub Sultan, near the head of the Golden Horn.

Hamid Pasha loved his wild, happy little garden. He reserved it to himself and the nightingales which sang the night through from the great Polonia tree, now heavy with blossoms, which overspread the Persian fountain.

Ruggles finished his reading of "Super Flumina Babylonis," and then, as Hamid Pasha made no sign, he turned to "A Watch in the Night," the preceding poem in the edition. At the last verse Hamid Pasha stirred amongst his cushions.

"Liberty, what of the night? —
I feel not the red rains fall,
Hear not the tempest at all,
Nor thunder in heaven any more.

All the distance is white
With the soundless feet of the sun.
Night, with the woes that it wore,
Night is over and done."

"Yes," said Hamid Pasha, "'night is over and done.' Day is often night — just as death is life." He raised his eyes to a great, billowy, cumulus cloud which was drawing itself slowly across the face of the sun. "It is going to be darker in a moment, and then my nightingales will begin to sing. Let us wait for them, my son."

Ruggles laid aside his book. Hamid Pasha reached an emaciated hand to the inlaid tabouret between them and touched a silver bell. A servant, awaiting the summons, appeared with a tray which held some tiny golden cups, a spirit lamp, and coffee ground to an impalpable flour. Silent as a ghost, he prepared the decoction, served it, and withdrew.

They sipped their coffee without speaking. Then Hamid Pasha, student, scholar, and colonel in the Ottoman imperial army, and Ruggles, late salesman in the Paris branch of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America, leaned back in their reclining chairs and watched the vivid life of the Bosphorus. Ruggles was the first to break the silence. He had sighted a small power boat with a Red Cross flag at her bow, bobbing about in the eddies close under the shore.

"Here comes Dr. Pembroke, sir," said he.

"Indeed? Ah, yes, quite so. I see the Red Cross." He touched his bell.

"Lord Pembroke is coming," said he in English, without looking to see that the servant was at his elbow.

"Yes, excellency," replied a hushed voice. "Mustapha is waiting at the landing."

CHAPTER XII

PEMBROKE did not leave the palace that night.

All that was mortal of Hamid Pasha left it at sunrise, when he requested to be carried to a balcony, and there, after having quietly enjoyed the colors and odors of the dawn and listened to the song of the nightingale, that was busily encouraging its mate in the ivy, from the heights of the Polonia tree, Hamid Pasha remarked, for the benefit of his soul, — and that of others who might care to listen, — that there was no God but God; then went to meet this Deity, or one of his representatives.

Ruggles mourned sincerely for his kindly patron, although Pembroke had prepared him for the event. Hamid Pasha had received a penetrating gunshot wound of the liver. The ball had been extracted and the wound skillfully treated. In a younger man recovery would have been undoubtedly complete, but Hamid Pasha had passed his seventieth year, and despite a rugged constitution the wound refused to heal, daily sapping his strength until the worn-out physical machinery lacked the force to continue its revolutions.

"The Ottoman Empire and I are in a similar state," the old man had said to Ruggles, "and I am glad that I shall be spared the pain of witnessing the death agonies of my beloved country. It is

God's will. It is kismet. Turkey has for many years been the Sick Man of Europe. Amputation after amputation has been performed, but the cancer, the gangrene, was too deeply seated for any hope of recovery. When the Padisha Abdul Hamid II came upon the throne we had lost Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro. Servia and Roumania were independent. Russia had regained the portion of Bessarabia which she lost in 1856 and held in an iron grip her Asiatic conquests, Kars, Ardahan, and Batoum. We ceded the Island of Cyprus to England and Thessaly gave itself to Greece. But worst of all, we have been these later years a house divided against itself. The children have raised profane hands against the mother. On her sick-bed they quarreled for the division of her jewels. God, in his wisdom, has seen fit to chasten us, but why continue to struggle at the cost of such human suffering as we have both witnessed? Many of us older children were prepared to aid the Padisha with our fortunes and our health, but it was not the Padisha or his empire that would have benefited. Kismet."

Hamid Pasha's last moments were as peaceful as those of a tired old man falling into a gentle sleep. Tears filled Ruggles's eyes as Pembroke described the end.

"And now, old chap," said Pembroke, in a brisker tone, "prepare yourself for a shock. I have some very wonderful news for you, and you might as well hear it from me now as later from the law-

yers. The old gentleman has left you a pot of money."

Ruggles turned his head slowly to stare at him.

"What!" said he. "Left me a pot of money?"

"Just so. Roughly speaking, I should say you'd inherit about half a million pounds. My congratulations. I'm jolly glad."

Ruggles stared at him dumbly. Half a million pounds — in the neighborhood of two and a half million dollars — His face went suddenly pale, and he leaned back in his chair, breathing uncertainly.

"Among other things," went on Pembroke, in his pleasant, quiet voice, "this place is yours. I would n't count too much on that, however, as the nearest mosque, with the assistance of the Imperial Ottoman Treasury, is pretty apt to collar it. But the bulk of the old gentleman's estate can't be touched. He told me that it was principally in European and American investments, and in the safeguard of his London bankers. This palace, and a comparatively small balance in the Ottoman Bank, is all that he's got in Turkey. Hamid Pasha had n't any too great confidence in the commercial honesty of his compatriots. Come, now, buck up, or I'll have to give you a squirt of strychnine."

For Ruggles's face was still white and his eyes fixed and staring. He, Ruggles, a millionaire! The idea was incredible — almost terrifying. His brain could not appear to grasp it.

"But why — why did he —"

"Why did he leave it to you? Oh, that's not such a hard one. You saved him from a rotten, nasty death and came jolly near getting scragged yourself, doing it. You sat tight when his own crowd bolted, and your Oriental is n't the chap to do things by halves when it comes to paying off a score, whether on the credit or debit side of the slate. Then afterwards, when he had you brought here, he got jolly fond of you, all outside the obligation. He had no heirs, and I fancy he was rather a lukewarm Mussulman, for all of his religious observances. Bit of a freethinker, Hamid Pasha was. Came from living so long in England, I presume. Well, feeling better?"

The color was returning to Ruggles's hollow cheeks and a brightness was growing in his eyes. It was rather more than a brightness, in fact, for as Pembroke glanced at him critically, they filled with tears. It is probable that Ruggles was at this moment more affected emotionally by the kindness of his benefactor than at the thought of the great fortune to which he had so marvelously fallen heir.

"Oh, I feel well enough," he answered, trying to smile. "Just sort o' — sort o' —"

"Sort of flabbergasted," Pembroke supplied. "Don't blame you a bit. I was a bit bowled over myself this morning, about an hour before he died, when he gave me this —"

He held out his strong, sinewy hand, and Rug-

gles saw upon the third finger such an emerald as might have ransomed a rajah. The great stone was flawless as a pool of the sea in a green grotto.

Pembroke reached into his inner pocket and drew out a letter.

"Hamid Pasha asked me to give you this," said he, and rose. "Got to be off, now. I'll run over from time to time and see how you're getting on. Good luck and congratulations and all that sort of thing. Remember, you're master here now, so give your orders."

He clapped his hands, and Mustapha came to conduct him to the landing. Ruggles, holding the letter in his trembling hands, leaned back in his chair and stared out across the shimmering straits.

"Gee!" muttered Ruggles, under his breath. "*Me* master here — give *my* orders, gee!"

He looked about at the gardens, then at the palace itself, a house of some considerable dimensions which was charming rather than imposing and the general scheme of which suggested a combination of Italian and New Turkish Renaissance with a suggestion of the Byzantine in its decorations, there being many ornate traceries copied from pleasing forms of animal and vegetable life, these embellishments apparently worked in as opportunity offered. There was room for technical criticism where purity of style was concerned, but the general result was unquestionably pleasing, for the Turks have always been masterly appreciators,

taking the best from other schools and combining all in harmonious effect, precisely as one might edit some anthology of verse. Hamid Pasha was such a critic and his house a combination of much that is exquisite in architecture without reference to the limitations of classic school or period.

Ruggles certainly had no fault to find with Hamid Pasha's palace, and the sudden knowledge that it was all his, even though it were to be taken from him the next week, filled him less with pride and delight than with a certain sense of shyness. He felt as though the ancient walls and terraces were looking at him with a sort of contemptuous amusement as if to say: "What! thou master here, thou flea from the belly of the raw and shaggy Western world? Thou master of us, — these terraces from whose proud heights Osman I, Ghazi the Victorious, son of Err-Toghrul Sha, first looked with conquering eyes on the ancient city of Constantine? Thou the master? Mash Allah, go hide thyself in a hole!"

But aside from this sudden diffidence, there was another matter to which Ruggles's mind passed uncomfortably as he sat there holding Hamid Pasha's unopened letter, which for some reason he rather dreaded to read. Though Turkish etiquette had made the mention of such a matter impossible, Ruggles was strongly of the conviction that, despite his age, the kindly Turk had maintained a harem. Of still nights there had come to his ears,

from somewhere within the palace walls, the *cadenza* of mandolins, guitars, and other stringed instruments, together with rippling and musical laughter, which the distance had rendered elusively seductive. Every day, from his window or from the terrace, he had seen feminine figures, in *yashmac* and *feridjé* (the *yashmac* the gauze veil and the *feridjé* the loose outer garment, usually of figured or embroidered or watered silk entirely enveloping the figure), embarking or disembarking from a long glittering caïque or perhaps the gig of Hamid Pasha's small steam yacht which plied frequently back and forth and up and down the Straits.

When he had begun to walk about a little, Ruggles had once started down a path that led around the Pasha's private garden through an avenue of pollards. He had gone some little distance when he had seen ahead a charming bungalow of considerable dimensions and Saracenesque architecture. Windows and veranda were closely latticed, and the whole was a bower of rose ramblers and grapevines. But when he had advanced halfway down the arbor, the white-clad, turbaned figure of what appeared to be a manservant of some description had slipped from the shrubbery and, with a polite salutation, had signified to him that he was trespassing. Ruggles, much confused, had retraced his steps, nor had he mentioned the incident to his host. He knew enough of Turkish domestic life to appreciate that there were in all

such establishments as this precincts to which a guest was not supposed to penetrate.

Well, no doubt Hamid Pasha had made provision for his household, and all whom it might contain. Ruggles decided that it was not worth while to fret himself over conditions of which he had been allowed to remain in ignorance. Possibly some instructions as to the future direction of the estate might be contained within the letter. If not, the lawyers would explain matters in greater detail. He broke the wax seal, and, with an emotion akin to awe, set himself to examine its contents. The communication was in English, carefully written in a fine, legible hand, slightly irregular from weakness, and read as follows: —

My Son: — These few words of farewell and invoking the blessing of God upon us all.

In this, the twilight of my earthly pilgrimage, I have in my heart naught but the glory of God, peace toward all men, and the love of those who are dear to me.

Childless as I am, and appreciating your worth and the sacrifices you have made for me, I have seen fit to create you in part my heir. Such goods as have been vouchsafed me I leave in part to the servants of my religious creed, in part to my country, and in part to you. The representatives of my men of affairs will make this last behest quite clear to you.

Of that which I now enjoin upon you we have never spoken, because it was not fitting. There are at this moment, as a part of my household, four ladies who are to be considered as my adopted daughters, since as daughters they have always been to me. In the possible

disruption of the Ottoman Empire there are bound to be many social changes. Whether or not Stamboul falls and my people are driven back into Asia, it is probable that the conditions of the past will be altered to conform with those of the Occident.

In making you one of my heirs, I have not been influenced alone by gratitude nor the love which I bear you, but also because I have looked deeply into your soul and found it pure, honest, and unafraid. In these my last hours I have studied you deeply, my son, with the result that I can think of no person to whom I can with greater confidence entrust a sacred responsibility.

I commit to you, therefore, the care of these four maidens, with the injunction that you, as my son, conduct yourself toward them in all ways as should a brother. In this I feel that you will not fail.

My instructions are that you conduct them from this place, as soon as your health permits, to London, Paris, or such a city as your judgment finds suitable in the great Western world. It has been arranged that their instructress, a most worthy lady of your own nationality, whom I obtained through the recommendation of the president of Robert College, shall assist you in the direction of their future welfare. All of the four are accomplished in Western languages and have been instructed in the conventions of Western society. Each is richly dowered in a financial sense for the forming of a possible matrimonial alliance. You yourself are the sole trustee of these estates.

In a word, my son, I wish these young ladies to be given the advantages and opportunities of the disenfranchised women of the Occident. I am unable to endure the possibility of their becoming the inmates of an Oriental harem. And I count upon your love for me and the loyalty which you have shown to a crippled cause

and a crippled man to carry out faithfully this last behest.

So far as concerns your own inheritance, I need say nothing. All has been provided for and entrusted to honest and efficient agents. My lawyers will call upon you shortly after the performance of the final rites of this poor clay, and you have always our esteemed friend Lord Pembroke with whom to advise. I have bequeathed to him my steam yacht for the work of the Red Cross.

And now, as my hand grows weak and my eyes dim, while the shadows lengthen and the stars appear, I can but give you my blessing, my son, and commit you to the God of us all, Who is and always has been and always will be God.

(Signed) Ben Ali Hamid Pasha,
Colonel, Imperial Ottoman Army.

CHAPTER XIII

It usually happens, for the better smelting of our souls, that when great wealth descends upon us, great responsibility goes with it. This is probably the reason why indolent philosophers have been for so many centuries given to the habit of decrying wealth.

Ruggles was neither indolent nor could he lay claim to being a philosopher, in spite of which, after reading Hamid Pasha's last message and considering the responsibility which the inheritance of his fortune enjoined, he could have found it in his heart to wish that he had been endowed with neither.

"Holy Moses!" said he to himself. "Me guardian of four ladies just out of a Turkish harem! *Me*, Dicky Ruggles? Say, I wonder if I'm still delirious — or what —"

He was not delirious at this moment, but daybreak found him in a raging fever in the course of which a healed wound of the thorax reopened. This fever was rather of malarial than traumatic origin, for previous to his being riddled with bullets in the defense of his wounded, Ruggles's system had soaked its fill of miasmas from the marshes near Derkos. It is probable that the not entirely eradicated plasmodia were roused to a fresh onslaught

as the result of his sitting too late on the terrace after the dew had begun to fall, forgetful of his health in contemplation of his extraordinary situation.

At any rate, in the week which followed it rather looked as if he might follow on the trail of his benefactor, of whom the discarded human envelope was during this time quietly laid to rest in the cypress-shrouded cemetery at Eyub Sultan on the hillside overlooking the tip of the Golden Horn.

Thanks to skillful care and his strong vitality, Ruggles flung off his fever in about ten days and was able to leave his bed. Pembroke had been to see him several times, while his nurses had been Mustapha Ali, a Turkish valet who had been long years in the service of Hamid Pasha, and an elderly Greek woman of intelligence and kindly demeanor named Sarah. Both spoke English, and Mustapha was particularly devoted to Ruggles, not only because of the dying injunctions of the master whom he revered, but because he knew the part which Ruggles had played in the defense of Hamid Pasha, and which had enabled the venerable man to die peacefully and as became his dignity instead of like a dog at the hands of the detested Bulgarians.

But it had seemed to Ruggles that during his fever there had been a white-clad figure sometimes passing quietly in and out of his room, with sometimes a whispered word to one or the other of his attendants. He had not noticed it particularly,

but the second or third day out of bed, as he was sitting by his open window, he saw what appeared to be the same figure approaching the house by the avenue which led under the lindens to the mysterious rose-covered bungalow. It disappeared under the loggia and a few moments later Mustapha came quietly to Ruggles's elbow.

"The American lady governess asks if you feel able to receive her, effendi," said he, with the customary salute.

Ruggles's heart gave a sudden bound. This must be the teacher from Robert College of whom Hamid Pasha had spoken in his letter.

"Certainly," he answered. "Ask her to come in, Mustapha."

There was a rustle in the doorway, and, turning his head, Ruggles's rather frightened eyes beheld a most attractive personality. A young woman who appeared to be of about his own age, or perhaps a little older, came forward briskly, with a smile on her lips and a general expression of frank friendliness on her most attractive face. She was of medium height, rather fully rounded of hip and bosom, with a high but wholesome coloring, and she appeared to radiate a general atmosphere of cheerful capability and energy. Her eyes were gray, with a mirthful expression, but clear, steady, and comprehending. Strictly speaking one would scarcely have said that she was pretty; her nose was a bit too short and her mouth too wide to claim this

quality, while chin and jaw had a firmness and decision not usually to be considered as conforming with the somewhat elastic regulations for feminine beauty. But she looked extremely nice to Ruggles, and he liked her immediately. She came forward without shyness or hesitation and offered him her hand, which Ruggles partly raised himself to take.

"How do you do, Mr. Ruggles?" said she, with a wide smile which revealed a double row of very white and even teeth. "I'm Miss Elliot, the young ladies' governess." Ruggles was struck by the unusually low pitch of her voice and its peculiar throaty quality. "I've looked in several times before, but you were too ill to notice me. It's so nice to see you sitting up again. Lord Pembroke was quite anxious about you."

Ruggles released the small, firm hand. The color crept up under the pale, transparent skin of his sunken cheeks.

"Thank you, very much," said he shyly. "I kind of remember seeing you a few times, but I guess I was too dopy to notice much. Won't you sit down?"

The vigilant Mustapha supplied a wicker chair abundantly upholstered in cushions. Miss Elliot seated herself, then leaned forward and looked at Ruggles with bright, animated eyes.

"Is n't it odd," she went on, "that we two Americans should find ourselves out here in Constantinople in such an extraordinary position?"

"It sure is," Ruggles answered fervently. "I have n't quite got it through my head yet. If I'd read such a thing in a story, I'd have thought the author was batty, or else trying to get a rise out of his readers. It makes me sort of dizzy to think about it."

"Then don't try to think about it just yet," said Miss Elliot. "Now, suppose you let me do the talking, because you're still pretty weak. I think, though, that it might be better for you to know something about the way things stand than to be puzzling your head about them."

"That's sure the truth," Ruggles agreed.

"Well, then, let me tell you all about it. I had a long talk with the lawyers. They came over yesterday, but Lord Pembroke said that you were not yet fit to see them. Hamid Pasha has left you practically a third of his estate, as Lord Pembroke has already told you."

"Oh, yes, I know all about that," said Ruggles. "But the part that — that's bothering me is about these — these —" He paused and the color flamed in his face.

"About the girls? Yes, I know all about that. You're their guardian and sole trustee. What of it?"

"Oh, Lord!"

Miss Elliot dropped her flushed face into her hands and her plump shoulders shook. Ruggles regarded her with a mixture of resentment and relief;

resentment at her laughing over a matter which had caused him such mental anguish, and relief that so apparently sensible and clear-headed a person could find any source of humor in so serious a situation as his. Miss Elliot raised her head and looked at him with brimming eyes.

"Please don't mind my laughing," said she, "but it does seem so funny."

"I wish it hit me that way," Ruggles answered, a little crossly. "What in the dickens am I going to do with 'em? I've never laid eyes on 'em. They don't know me from Adam. Who told *you* about it?"

"Hamid Pasha, himself. You see, Mr. Ruggles, we're both in the same boat, more or less. Only you're the captain. Hamid Pasha's idea was that the girls should be given the opportunities of modern social conditions, just as though they were American or English or French. He considered them only as daughters —" It was now Miss Elliot's turn to blush and her high color being richly reflected from Ruggles's face, there was a blushing match which lasted for a moment or two and in which Ruggles won.

"Then, as I take it," said Ruggles, who had been curiously put at ease by the momentary confusion of his capable companion, "our job is to take 'em to some civilized country and get 'em respectably married off."

"Precisely," said Miss Elliot, touching her eyes with her handkerchief.

"What do *they* think about that scheme?" Ruggles demanded.

"They're crazy about it —" Miss Elliot bit her red lower lip. "Let me tell you, Mr. Ruggles, that the girls are merely lovable, mischievous children. When I explained to them the plans for their futures, they began jumping up and down and clapping their hands, just as though I'd promised them some sort of a treat. I explained to them that they must be very careful not to make you angry or displeased, as it was now for you to say what they were to have and where they were to go, and that if you disapproved, it might go very hard with them. They're frightened almost to death at the mere mention of your name."

"Gee!" Ruggles muttered.

"You see," Miss Elliot continued, "you are their bogey-man. I have n't made any actual threats, but I've given them to understand that they'd better be good if they want to be happy. I'm sure we shan't have any trouble with them."

"Gee! — I hope so. But what are we going to do with 'em?"

"The first thing that we've got to do with them," said Miss Elliot, with decision, "is to get them the proper European clothes. I've had fitters and cutters coming over here from Pera for the last week, and you may have heard the sewing machine buzzing away all day long, for there have been two Greek seamstresses at work in the *haremlik*. The

girls love their new clothes, and I 'm sure they 'll try to act up to them, like most people in these days — or any other days, for that matter. I 've been hard at work giving them lessons in deportment —" Miss Elliot dropped her face into her hands again, and once more the plump shoulders shook until Ruggles, who had been listening to her discourse, fascinated and glue-eyed, began to wonder if he ought not to try to restrain her in some way. She seemed to be on the point of shaking herself apart.

" From the way you talk, you 'd think it was a regular picnic," said he. "But after they get their clothes and all that, what are we going to do with 'em, then? That 's what I want to know."

"Why, after that," said Miss Elliot, touching her eyes again with her handkerchief, "all we 've got to do is to find them suitable husbands. I don't think there 'll be much trouble about that. They 're the prettiest things you ever saw, and far more accomplished than the average American society girl. They all speak three or four languages, and they are all musical, and can all dance beautifully, and are bright and merry and full of fun and mischief. Besides, they 've got a dot of two hundred thousand dollars each. I assure you, Mr. Ruggles, although I 'm a graduate of Vassar and managed to collar most of the honors in my class, those girls make me feel like an ignoramus, at times."

"Well," said Ruggles, dryly, "don't let it worry you any more than you can help. I 've been feeling

that way all the time ever since I came out here — and I thought I was pretty hot stuff when I was selling shoes for a living."

"And don't let that worry *you*," retorted Miss Elliot briskly. "My father was the leading baker in Kansas City, and when he married my mother she was waitress in a Harvey eating-house on the Santa Fé. But I don't see any reason in that for making me afraid of a quartette of pampered harem ladies. No, nor of any of this whole European outfit, Lord Pembroke included, — though he's the only one that ever came anywhere near making me feel the least bit raw; because he's so kind and natural, I suppose. Listen, Mr. Ruggles; you and I are Americans, and as such we can make good where lots of other people in our position could n't, because they'd be so hobbled and hog-tied by old traditions that they would n't dare assert themselves. Now, Hamid Pasha was a very wise old man, and he rather felt that he could trust us to carry out his plans for these girls more honestly and conscientiously than lots of people among his acquaintance who had much better positions in society than we have. He has made you the guardian of their fortunes and their well-being and he has made me the guardian of their education and behavior — and we're both being mighty well paid for it. All we've got to do now is to make good — and we're going to do it, too."

She leaned back with a rather flushed face and

sparkling eyes. Ruggles stared at her with an admiration too deep for words.

"Gee! — but that's the talk," said he. "Well, all I can say is that you can count on me to do my share."

"Of course I can — and I do. Now, Mr. Ruggles, I've been thinking a lot about it and have talked to one or two people —" She paused, a little disconcerted by the intent expression in Ruggles's blue eyes.

"What did Dr. Pembroke say about it?" he asked.

"He said — well" — defiantly — "what makes you so sure that I went to Lord Pembroke about it?"

"Why should n't you?" Ruggles asked. "He's about the handiest person around these parts to ask advice of."

"Yes — of course. I talked it over with him and with Lady Audrey Charteris, who came out here with the British Red Cross. They both advised about the same thing. They agreed that our best plan would be to take the girls to Paris, where you might rent a good-sized place with a garden and grounds just outside the city. Lady Charteris suggested Neuilly. Then you must find some well-connected woman who might be willing to take a paid position as the girls' — well, social godmother, as one might say; somebody who could see that they met the better class of people and made nice

acquaintances. They shall be introduced as Hamid Pasha's adopted daughters, which they really are. You yourself are Hamid Pasha's adopted son. I am merely their governess and companion. You catch the idea?"

"S—sure," said Ruggles, with no very violent accent of conviction.

"Well, then," continued Miss Elliot briskly, "that's the general idea. Of course, it's subject to modifications."

"Of course," Ruggles agreed.

"It should n't be so very hard," said Miss Elliot meditatively. "You see, you will have an income of about — about a hundred thousand dollars a year, so the lawyers tell me. That's quite independent of the girls' marriage settlements. A hundred thousand dollars is something over half a million francs, and there's a lot of back interest that has n't been drawn, and which is now to your credit in the Ottoman Bank. As soon as you are strong enough you must go over there and establish your identity. Lord Pembroke will go with you."

"I'll go over to-morrow," said Ruggles. "I'm strong enough — all but my legs."

"Well," said Miss Elliot reflectively, "I must say that I think the sooner you go the better. The lawyers seemed to feel that there might be some disposition on the part of the Ottoman Government to hold back Hamid's real and personal property

here in Turkey. The Sheikh-ul-Islam, who, as Lord Pembroke says, is a sort of Archbishop of Canterbury, is after this place already, and the chances are that it would be easier to let it go than to try to hang on to it. There'd be no end of trouble. No, Mr. Ruggles, so far as I have been able to find out, the sooner we leave here the better."

"I guess you're right," Ruggles agreed. "They might try to hold up the girls"—he was entering rapidly into the moral sense of his protectorship of these helpless damsels.

"I'd just like to see 'em try," snapped Miss Elliot pugnaciously. "Those girls are in our care now, and anybody who tries to interfere will think he's fallen into a steam thresher."

Ruggles stared at her admiringly and felt his own confidence beginning to return. He would not himself care to be the person to interfere, he thought, as he took note of the vital face with its steady, comprehending eyes and resolute chin.

"Gee! but you make me feel better about this job," said he. "I wish I'd met you sooner; it would have saved me a lot of worrying."

Miss Elliot smiled encouragingly. "Well," said she, "you're not to worry any more, but to get well as fast as you can. As I said a few minutes ago, Mr. Ruggles, we are both in the same boat. You must know that Hamid Pasha left me in his will about twenty-five thousand dollars, with the request that I continue to act in the capacity of gov-

erness, for which service I am to be paid one hundred and fifty dollars a month by the trustees of his estate. Your position is, of course, a little different one, because you have nothing more to gain in a financial way by devoting yourself to the carrying out of his wishes."

"I guess I've been given enough already to pay for all that I can ever do," Ruggles answered. "Say, are these girls Turkish, or what?"

He looked at Miss Elliot with a sudden curiosity. Until meeting her, he had rather dreaded to let his mind rest on his new and embarrassing responsibility, but this reluctance had been dispelled within the last few minutes, to be replaced by an intense interest and a not unpleasant excitement.

"One is Turkish. Her name is Bulbul — nightingale, you know. Then there 's Roxana, who comes from Tiflis, in the Caucasus. She's a beauty — tall, with blue eyes and a great mane of red-gold hair. She and Bulbul are each twenty. The next is Alessandra, a Roumelian, who is nineteen. And then there's Rosa, who has Italian blood, but was born on the Island of Cyprus. She's only seventeen. She was to have married the son of an old friend of Hamid Pasha, but he was killed at Lule Bourgas. Rosa's a mischievous little thing, pretty as she can be. She reminds you of a Persian kitten. They're all four very dear girls, though I never feel quite sure about Roxana. She does n't say all that she thinks, like the other three. You must understand,

Mr. Ruggles, that none of these girls" — the color flamed again in Miss Elliot's face, to be as quickly reflected in that of Ruggles — "that is, that they are — are —"

"I guess I understand," Ruggles mumbled.

"What I am trying to tell you," said Miss Elliot, "is that these girls have never suffered any of the degradations of harem life. They have been carefully brought up and are not vicious-minded, like the inmates of some of the harems where I have given lessons. All four were destined to become the wives of high officials or very rich men, I imagine, as they are very beautiful and nothing has been spared on their education. But I want to warn you of one thing — such girls are very quickly spoiled by too much good nature or familiarity on the part of those in authority over them. They look upon you as their master — their owner, you might almost say. They know that if they are good and obedient, you intend to make good matches for them and give them each a handsome dowry, but that if they are naughty, you have the right to send them off to shift for themselves as best they may. A Turkish woman thinks as much of her dot as a Frenchwoman, and you may be sure they'll behave themselves as long as they don't get it into their heads that you are easy and good-natured and that they can do as they like."

Ruggles's gradual inflation during this discourse might be compared to that of a pneumatic tire

under the repeated strokes of a small air-pump. Guardian, trustee, master, owner of four lovely girls who thought of him with fear and awe — it was an outrageous but an exhilarating idea. He was conscious of a growing sense of authority, of a dignity of mastery and firm proprietorship. Many men, he thought to himself, might look upon the whole matter as a stupendous joke and acquit themselves of such an office with an unworthy flippancy. The look which he turned upon Miss Elliot was almost austere.

"You need n't be afraid," said he, compressing his lips. " I'll let 'em understand that there ain't any nonsense about me."

Miss Elliot bit her lip, repressing a strong desire to laugh. She read Ruggles as though the workings of his honest mind had been thrown upon a screen by a cinematograph.

"That's what I count upon," she managed to reply. "Now, in regard to our plans, don't you think it might be a good idea for you to go to Paris, as soon as you 're able to travel, and look up a house? Some big place with a garden and surrounded by a wall. Then you will need to buy a motor-car — a big limousine. You can take Mustapha and the cook, Emilio. As soon as you get things settled, I can follow with the girls and Sarah, their old servant, and a maid, and Selim, the dragoman. In that way we shall be sure of having trusty and devoted servants and ones who will not gossip."

"That ain't a bad idea," said Ruggles. "I think I know of an old gentleman in Paris who would n't mind giving me some good advice — a Mr. Falconer. He's a retired English clergyman and the salt of the earth. Pembroke knows him well."

"The very person," said Miss Elliot. "No doubt he may be able to put you in touch with some Englishwoman of good family and connections who would be willing to act as the girls' social godmother — for a salary, of course."

Ruggles thought suddenly of Miss Challand.

"I know the very person, right now," said he, "if she would be willing to do it."

During his convalescence Ruggles had thought a good deal about Darthea and her aunt, and it seemed to him that his miraculous change of fortune could not help but bring them within his reach again. He was no longer a shoe clerk. He was a millionaire, and he felt that he had earned his wealth honorably by devotion to his duty on the field of battle. History proved that many a great family had had its origin in precisely that way. Moreover, he was the proud possessor of a Turkish decoration which his benefactor had procured for him and which conferred the relative title of a knight in Ottoman society.

In youth the human mind is able to adapt itself to an unexpected flood of prosperity with wonderful facility. The tide of such an inundation is invariably tempered to a normal warmth and marvel-

ously buoyant. This is perhaps because youth is ever prone to dream of just such joyful eventualities and is often more perplexed by their delay than by a swift and unexpected realization. No youngster of romantic mind is ever to be greatly surprised at being suddenly presented with the deed of a castle in Spain.

Ruggles, blessed with the heart of a child, was rapidly adapting himself to the fulfillment of just such fancies as had often amused his mind during periods of repose. It cannot be said that he was imaginative, but he possessed that happy faculty of fantasy which is imagination in its infancy. He seemed to have swum backward against the tides of the ages to the Thousand and One Nights. Nothing was no longer impossible — not even Ruth —

But as the thought of Ruth swept across his brain he grew suddenly faint and breathless. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. Miss Elliot noticed with alarm the sudden pallor of his face.

"There," said she, rising, "I've talked too long and tired you. Forgive me, please."

"Oh, it's not that," said Ruggles, rather weakly. "I just happened to think of something that — that I've never had the nerve to think about before."

CHAPTER XIV

A POLITE and polished Greek lawyer, with a name which suggested the undulations when one shakes the end of a rope, called upon Ruggles and offered him proof positive of much that had seemed like the dream of a hasheesh habitué. This lawyer's card announcing him as the attorney at Constantinople for a banking house of which the name was respected the world over, Ruggles affixed his modest signature to a number of very interesting documents, which Pembroke, who had brought the lawyer over in his launch, assured him was the correct thing for him to do. Pembroke and the lawyer, after having partaken of Turkish coffee and cakes, departed, leaving with Ruggles a considerable treasure in gold and notes for immediate expenses and the assurance that the bank's Paris correspondents would honor his drafts for whatever sum he might require.

This interview did not fatigue Ruggles. On the contrary, it had a tonic effect. He was possessed of a clear, businesslike head for figures, and his acumen in seizing the details presented to him surprised both Pembroke and the Greek lawyer. The latter had brought a list of Hamid Pasha's holdings, which were widely scattered and included sound securities in Russia, the Far East, Europe, the

United Kingdom, and America. Among the American investments in the United States were stocks and bonds of different railways, certain industrials, and a considerable block of the preferred stock of the Walkeasy Shoe Company. Ruggles's eyes lightened as he looked at this item, and affairs began to seem more real to him.

"I know all about that stuff," said Ruggles, to the benignant Mr. Karapopoulopoulous — or sounds to that effect. "The company 's all right, but darn poorly managed."

He looked at Pembroke and grinned. Pembroke roared, and Mr. K., etc., pushed back his shell-rimmed spectacles and looked at them inquiringly from under his white bushy brows. He had always understood that this security was a very sound one.

The consultation left Ruggles with his self-confidence marvelously restored. If the Turks wanted to grab the palace, let them grab it. What could he do with it, anyhow? It had always belonged to the Turks, and God knows they had been stripped enough, poor fellows. Let it go to the tomb with Hamid Pasha and his wearied country.

Left alone, Ruggles summoned Mustapha and asked for Miss Elliot. She had gone to Stamboul, Mustapha said, with the dressmaker. Ruggles signifying to Mustapha that he had no need of his services, took a stout cane and went out to limp about the terrace and breathe the free air fanning down the Straits from the Black Sea — that dread

Euxine of the ancients which has probably been the scene of more marine disasters than any body of water of its size in the whole world.

It was quite a different Ruggles from the one who had sat there some weeks before beneath the polonia tree reading the "Songs before Sunrise" to the dying Hamid Pasha. This interview with the lawyer had given him self-confidence, concrete proof as it was that he and no other was master of the household.

In the course of his painful promenade, he passed the private garden, but had no wish to enter there, as the spot was fraught with saddened memories. Skirting its edge, with no particular objective, he came presently to the head of the linden-shaded avenue that led to the *haremlik*. He paused and drew his breath deeply.

"I wonder if anybody'd have the nerve to try to stop me if I went down here, now," he said to himself.

The shaded bower tempted and fascinated him. At the far end he caught a glimpse of the latticed, rose-covered kiosk, and as he stood there staring in its direction, there came faintly to his ears, carried as though telephonically the length of the tunneled, mossy corridor, a rippling, gurgling laugh.

Ruggles's heart pounded at his ribs. There, two hundred paces distant, were his youthful wards, happily amusing themselves in their pretty bower. And here was he, their guardian and master, dreary

and alone. Why not make their acquaintance now as well as later? Why moon about the grounds, bored and solitary, when there were four pretty girls of whom he was the appointed protector down there at the end of the avenue? Certainly no form of introduction was necessary to one in his position.

He shook off the sudden shyness which had seized him on catching sight of the kiosk. Ruggles had, in fact, lost much of his native diffidence within the last few months. The parts which he had played, the sights which he had seen, and the suffering through which he had passed, had hardened and matured him. Was he, a millionaire and stockholder in many important companies, including the great Walkeasy concern, to be frightened from visiting a portion of his own inherited estate by a rippling laugh from a girl of whose destiny he was the chief arbiter? Who was there to dictate to him? It was his to act as best pleased him.

Still, he hesitated for an instant. He glanced down at his costume, which was of snowy serge, delivered with others only the day before by a tailor summoned from Pera. Perhaps he ought to announce his visit. But surely there must be servants at the kiosk, and if the ladies were not ready for his visit they could scamper to their apartments and prepare themselves. At any rate, he would walk to the end of the avenue and have a look at the place from a closer point of view.

Supporting himself on his stick he turned down

the path. The sheltering trees were old and gnarled and moss-covered, their tops clipped squarely just above the forking of the upper branches and the sprouts so heavy in foliage that not a ray of sunlight was able to struggle through. Almost at the end was an open space; a diminutive but delicious garden filled with sunshine and from which a pergola led off to a sunken garden of Italian design. As Ruggles drew near, he saw coming toward him from this pergola the same white-clad figure which had some weeks previous barred his approach.

"Now we'll see who's master here," said Ruggles to himself. "If that fellow tries to turn me back this time, he loses his job to-night."

Leaning on his stick with a set face he awaited the approach of the other. As the man drew near, Ruggles saw that he was of large stature with a rather flaccid face and regular features and a complexion the color of *café-au-lait*. He was no longer young, and his dark eyes as they fell upon Ruggles were lighted by a gleam of recognition and respect. Within a few paces he paused, stooped until the tips of his fingers touched the ground, then raised, carrying them to the forehead, the mouth, and the chest. It was the usual Turkish salutation, but carried out to a degree afforded only to a high personage. This performed he stood erect, apparently awaiting orders.

"I've come to call on the ladies," Ruggles said. "Suppose you go and find out if they can see me."

The man smiled apologetically and shook his head. It was evident that he did not understand English. Ruggles repeated his request in French, and this time with immediate result. The eunuch saluted and hastened toward the house. Ruggles wondered if he were dumb, which as a matter of fact was the case. A moment later Sarah emerged from a latticed door and came to where Ruggles was waiting.

"Sarah," said he, "I thought I'd come down and get acquainted with the young ladies, if they don't object."

Sarah smiled. The Greek woman had seen something of the world, having been of Hamid Pasha's London household during his diplomatic service there. During recent years she had been duenna of the *haremlik*, accompanying the inmates on their frequent excursions, for it must not be supposed that even under the old régime these ladies were in any way prisoners, so far as their goings and comings were concerned. It was required only (and that by the Sultan himself) that they veil their faces and cloak their forms on going abroad and be always under rigid chaperonage.

Sarah smiled, but her intelligent face showed not the slightest hint of surprise or disapproval. On the contrary, she looked rather pleased.

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," said she. "The young ladies would be very happy. If you do not mind waiting a few minutes, sir. The young ladies are

just trying on their new French gowns. Will you not rest for a moment there on the bench under the pergola?" Her face, which must have been strikingly handsome in youth, became suddenly solicitous. "You must not tire yourself, sir."

As she spoke, Ruggles, who was facing the charming bungalow, observed an agitation of the jalousies and his ear caught such a medley of stifled chirpings and twitterings as might come from a nest of baby birds. Sarah heard it also, but affected not to. She conducted Ruggles, who was expressing his willingness to wait until the young ladies were prepared to receive him, to the bench in the shade of the vine-covered pergola.

"Hassan shall bring you some cushions," said she. "You see, sir, we are very busy preparing the young ladies for Paris. Some of their things were all wrong, and Miss Elliot has returned herself with the cutter to make sure they understand. In a very few minutes, sir."

Ruggles thanked her and limped over to the bench. Hassan overtook him on the way, his arms filled with cushions which he arranged quickly, then withdrew. Ruggles seated himself and waited. He suspected that Sarah might wish to tidy the place before asking him into the house.

Half an hour passed and Ruggles's nervous expectancy began to give place to impatience. Had he guessed that the diplomatic duenna was trying to delay the presentation until Miss Elliot's return

he would have been more impatient still. Sarah had not dared to presume so far as to suggest that the master of the household postpone his visit, but she knew that Miss Elliot would be sorely vexed to find that Ruggles had been to the *haremlik* in her absence.

The ruse proved entirely successful, for as Ruggles was beginning to fume and fret at the delay he saw the white-clad figure of the governess coming down the linden avenue, followed by a woman carrying an enormous cardboard box. Miss Elliot did not see Ruggles until she had approached to within a few steps, when she stopped and regarded him with an expression on her flushed face in which intense surprise was mingled with strong disapproval.

"Mercy!" said she, in her crisp but low-pitched voice, "what are you doing here, Mr. Ruggles?" — No salaams from Agnes Elliot.

"I'm waiting to call on the young ladies," Ruggles answered, rather shortly. He had already become sufficiently accustomed to deference that the curt, challenging tone annoyed him. "It seemed to me about time that we got acquainted."

"But you can't come in now," said Miss Elliot. "It's not convenient."

"Oh, I guess if it's convenient for me, it'll have to be convenient for the rest of you," Ruggles answered, not disagreeably but with a note of finality. Miss Elliot was a very nice, capable young

woman, but, after all, she was merely the paid governess, and Ruggles had no idea of having the reins of authority snatched from his hands.

Miss Elliot's gray eyes flashed, and she repressed a strong inclination to stamp her foot. The combative expression of her face would have put to flight the Ruggles of Paris, but that shy and retiring individual was gone forever.

"I must say, I don't think it's very considerate of you to try to make your first call in my absence," said she.

"Why not?" Ruggles asked. "Did Hamid Pasha use to ask you for permission to come here?"

"Of course not. But that was very different. Besides, we are busy trying on clothes and getting ready to go away, and the place is all littered up with patterns and sewing machines and dressmakers and things."

"See here, Miss Elliot," said Ruggles pleasantly, "I've been up and about for several days now, and you have n't been near me nor said a word about my meeting the ladies. It's been mighty tiresome and lonely for me, hanging around here with nobody to talk to. I eat all by myself and sit out on the terrace all by myself and limp around all by myself, and I've got about enough of it. What's the use of being the head of the whole outfit if I've got to hobble around here and talk to myself, like a lame parrot? Listen; I've come down here to see

the girls and I'm going to see them. That's all there is about it."

His clear blue eyes looked straight into the angry gray ones of the girl, and for a moment there was a very tense little tug-of-war between the two wills; hers strong with hot vitality and a natural gift of authority; his quietly forceful with a natural latent strength which had been for many years dormant, but which was now awakened by the stress of recent months of stirring events and roused to virile action by this newborn claim upon its self-assertion.

As the two were locked in this silent struggle for moral ascendancy, the jalousies of the bungalow were set to rustling and there reached the ears of both a stifled giggle, followed by a smothered *sh-h* and that peculiar sound common to all humanity which comes when a laugh is checked in its exit by the mouth and struggles to escape through the nasal passages. The color flamed into Miss Elliot's face.

"Mr. Ruggles," said she, "please go back to the house. Don't you see that you are putting me in a very difficult position? How am I to have any discipline if you interfere with my authority? You shall meet the young ladies just as soon as we are ready to receive you. Really, Mr. Ruggles, you have been guilty of a serious breach of etiquette in coming here, all unannounced, and during my absence. If you act like that you will spoil everything and end by making me quite ridiculous. I must in-

sist, now, on your going back to the house and leaving me to manage this part of the establishment."

Ruggles's lean face stiffened slightly, but the never-failing smile was there.

"I'd hate like anything to interfere with your end of the business," said he. "But now that I'm here it sort of seems like I ought to see the thing through. How would I look if I was chased away like a cat that's been caught snoopin' around the bird-cage — what?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid that you'll have to wait," replied Miss Elliot, with decision.

Ruggles shook his head slowly. "No," said he, "it's too bad, but I guess you'll have to make the best of it, Miss Elliot. I've been waiting here for half an hour already, and I'm getting sort of tired. Now, suppose you go in and see if Sarah has got things straightened out."

Miss Eliot's gray eyes turned almost black. "Then you persist in coming in?" she demanded.

"That's it," Ruggles answered.

"Very well. Then to-morrow, Mr. Ruggles, you can look around for another governess."

"Just as you like," Ruggles answered, with polite indifference.

CHAPTER XV

RUGGLES'S general idea of a Turkish harem was that of most people of the Western world, based chiefly on perusal of the "Arabian Nights" and other descriptions in more modern tales, and which must afford the latter-day Turks considerable amusement. The stock properties were of fulsome beauties, in silken "panties" drawn in above morocco slippers with curled-up toes, flopping about on divans, blowing perfumed smoke from nargilehs, and observing indolently the ablutions of sister captives splashing in marble fountains and attended by semi-nude slave women of African origin; monkeys, parrots, Persian pussy-cats, a good many bare arms and legs and things, and, guarding the door, huge blackamoors of the ox variety, bearing drawn scimitars and with forbidding scowls.

Art had combined with literature to paint this picture in Ruggles's mind, and although the modern atmosphere of Hamid Pasha's palace had eliminated any expectation of so barbaric a setting as the above, he was still quite unprepared for the *milieu* of the apartment into which he was ushered by Sarah, a few minutes after Miss Elliot's haughty and silent entrance of the house.

Ruggles entered with no emotion of triumph at having gained his point. Rather, he regretted that it had been placed in question, making it necessary for him to exert an authority on which he had hoped not to be obliged to insist. Yet, on the whole, he was not altogether sorry that the issue had been raised. He liked Miss Elliot and respected her, and counted upon her aid in helping to carry out his moral obligation to Hamid Pasha, but when all was said and done her services had been retained subject to his own approval. She was the girls' mentor, not his, and if she counted on directing his behavior from the start, it was better that they should come to an understanding as soon as possible. Ruggles had acted precisely as he might have done had he been given the managership of the Vienna branch of the Walkeasy Shoe Company, and some capable and attractive saleswoman had informed him that he was not to enter the ladies' department when shoes were being tried on.

He did not believe that Miss Elliot would resign her position. There had been an expression on her flushed face as she turned to enter the house which was not entirely of anger; surprise and a certain quality of respect were also written there.

As Ruggles waited, leaning on his stick, Sarah came out and asked, deferentially: —

"Will you please come in, sir? I am sorry that you have been kept waiting so long."

"Oh, that's all right," Ruggles answered, and

followed the Greek woman to the rose-covered veranda and into the house.

The room into which he was ushered was precisely such as one might find in the summer residence of some rich and traveled Briton of simple but æsthetic taste; such a room as one might find in any of the charming, unpretentious residences on the Thames between Henley and Maidenhead. The ceiling was higher, perhaps, and richly ornate in coffer-work, sunken panels of carved oak, containing in their centers roses or pomegranates, while the highly polished floor, of the same valuable Palestine oak, or "Abraham's oak," now scarcely to be had, was strewn with such rugs as are to be seen only in museums and in the houses of the pretentiously rich; in both of which public institutions they are apt to be bogus. But the atmosphere of the room was purely modern, just as a child may be very young and still have ancestors — as most children have, even though these ancestors are, at times, not worth the having. Here, however, the elders were in sweet sympathy with their successors. Nothing clashed. Harmony of proportion, color, and design swam together with no more friction than fish in a pool. The bright chintz curtains from Mr. Somebody's big store on Sloane Street cheered the neutral tints of Mr. Somebody else, once merchant of Smyrna or Bagdad, as a newborn baby might cheer his many times grandfather in heaven. Furniture, which must have appeared absurdly

callow to the very ancient rugs, and fragments of tapestry, were supported by these latter as sweetly as a great-grandfather might carry his wide-eyed great-grandchild, ridiculously young, and finding infinity in the flaming hues of a brightly colored chrysanthemum.

It looked all right to Ruggles. He gave Hamid Pasha credit for a lot of taste. More than that, after the first shock of disillusionment about the divans and slaves and things, it occurred to him that perhaps he had never quite thoroughly appreciated Hamid Pasha. This was quite true. He never had. It was not altogether Ruggles's fault, however. He had not had the time. If he had been allowed another century or two this fault might easily have been corrected.

The furniture of the room did not belong to any single school or period. There was a large Louis XVI center table, on which lay books and magazines both French and English. There were a few handsome Adam chairs distributed with those of Louis XV, Chippendale, and others, with a Sheraton bookcase, all of these different pieces selected apparently for their individual beauty, and thus quite in harmony, as beautiful objects are never discordant. The room was, in fact, suggestive of its fair habituées. In one corner was a grand piano and a harp, while on a divan lay a mandolin and a guitar.

There was nobody present when Ruggles entered,

but from some distant part of the house came the low chatter of several voices, all apparently talking at once. He looked about him with surprise and pleasure at the pretty, homelike atmosphere of the place. Here, certainly was no suggestion of voluptuous sensuality; no heavy, scented air, no slaves, no scimitars, nothing but a wholesome brightness and cheer. Through an open window came the rollicking song of a warbler, together with the odor of roses and jasmine.

From behind the portières at the far end of the room there came a rustle; then the curtains were slid smartly back with a clicking of gilded rings, and Miss Elliot entered, at the head of a charming group of girls. Ruggles rose to his feet and stood supporting himself with his cane. He was scarcely able to believe his eyes. Harem ladies? These lovely sylphs gowned in the latest Parisian models! They were just such charming creatures as he had frequently seen stepping from sparkling limousines to enter the Ritz at the tea-hour. They were wonderful. His head swam as he looked at them.

Such was Ruggles's first impression. That of the girls was of a sort to be compared to such emotions as might have filled the pulsating bosoms of the maidens of Thrace at sight of Alexander the Great. All such sentiments as these are purely comparative and drawn from the experiences of our own little lives. Here was the youth who had fought like a lion over the body of their beloved

protector, and who had succeeded him in honor and estate. Here was the fair demigod who was curator of their fortunes — and who bought them nice new gowns. He was young and brave and handsome and very rich. All four fell violently in love with him upon the spot.

"Mr. Ruggles," said Miss Elliot, "let me present Miss Bulbul."

Miss Bulbul, a plump and pretty Turkish maiden, with hair so black that it was almost blue, plucked her chiffon skirt daintily between her thumbs and fingers and made a curtsy. Ruggles, who was on the point of limping forward to shake hands, bowed. Miss Bulbul straightened herself, took a deep breath, and nudged her way back behind Miss Alessandra, on whose dainty slippered foot she inadvertently stepped, thus evoking a stifled "Aie!" from Miss Alessandra.

"Miss Roxana," said Miss Elliot.

Miss Roxana, a wonderful ruddy blonde who topped Miss Elliot by half a head, stepped forward to make her curtsy. For an instant her great amber-colored eyes looked straight and fearlessly into those of Ruggles, who thought that he had never seen so magnificent a creature. There was no humility in this girl's gaze, and no antagonism. It was as straight and unconsciously questioning as that of a fearless child. Then the long lashes swept down, and with a movement as graceful as deep water running over a dam, she made her curtsy,

straightened herself like a poplar after a gust of wind, and stepped aside, still intently studying Ruggles.

"Miss Alessandra."

The slim Roumelian girl made her curtsy quickly, panting a little as she did so, then stepped back with a stifled giggle that was the result of nerves. Ruggles was smiling as he made his bows. There was a red spot in either of his pale cheeks. It was like a happy dream of princesses and things.

"Miss Rosa."

The little maiden from the Island of Cyprus took a deep breath, grabbed her skirt on either side as if clinging to a life-line, stepped forward, and paused. Ruggles, watching her curiously, saw her dark eyelashes flutter like the wings of a butterfly impaled on a pin. Her pupils dilated and she swayed. Ruggles stepped forward quickly. He saw that the little girl was almost overpowered by emotion.

"Let's cut out the curtsying business and shake hands, as we do in America," said he, and caught her just as she was about to fall.

In spite of his bad ankle, he managed to support her to the divan, where he placed her among the cushions. Miss Elliot clapped her hands, at which a maid came quickly and was sent in search of salts.

"The poor child has been on her feet getting fitted all day long," Miss Elliot explained.

Ruggles seated himself on the edge of the divan

and patted Rosa's hand. She looked up at him and smiled. The color crept back into her cheeks.

"You are ver'ry nice," said she.

Ruggles regarded her benevolently. She was as pretty as it is possible for a girl of seventeen to be, with a clear olive skin and the eyes of a gazelle. It is doubtful if even that kindly natured poet and warrior, Hamid Pasha, had ever been infused with more paternal sentiment than was Ruggles at that moment.

"Say, Rosa," said he, "let me tell you something — don't you ever be afraid of me. Think about me just like I was your big brother that's going to take care of you — see?"

"Yes," Rosa answered, and her small hand tightened on his. "I see, Ruggles Effendi."

Sarah, entering at this moment with unnecessary salts, Ruggles ceded her his place. Misses Bulbul, Alessandra, and Roxana were still standing, and there was a peculiar warmth in the eyes of the gorgeous Georgian beauty as they followed every movement of Ruggles. Miss Elliot looked at them all critically, then at Ruggles, whose face had turned rather white from the pain in his ankle due to the strain put upon it when supporting Rosa. Miss Elliot understood. Her bright eyes had caught the contraction of his features as he had practically carried the girl to the divan.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Ruggles," said she, and pushed a chair to where he was standing.

Ruggles thanked her with his quick, flashing smile, and his blue eyes traveled from her to the three expectant girls, who were watching him with a devouring intentness. As they met those of Roxana, the long lashes of the lovely Georgian quivered. A marvelous rosy wave of color flooded her exquisite complexion. It was the first time since childhood that any man but the venerable Hamid Pasha had looked upon her unveiled face, and her emotion was almost that of a maiden surprised at her sylvan bath by some Prince Charming, hunting in the forest.

From time immemorial, Trans-Caucasia has supplied the harems of Turkey, Persia, and Egypt with lovely girls, just as Roumelia has supplied rose attar, and the Crimea silk. It has been a commerce, degrading, from the Occidental point of view, but not cruel. A lovely daughter born to a poor Caucasian family was a gift of the gods in more senses than one, and that region is famous for its lovely girls, as why should it not be, considering that it was the cradle of human physical perfection?

Once a daughter of some rugged mountaineer of the provinces of Kutais or Kars or Tiflis was discovered to be endowed with beauty and intelligence, her fortune was assured — and usually that of her family. Her plainer sisters cut the wood and hauled the water and tended the goats, while Miss Beauty took her ease, and laved her skin with fresh

cream, and slept, and grew daily more beautiful, until, as a little girl of ten or twelve, she was purchased by some traveling merchant of this trade and the price paid would sometimes raise a whole family from poverty to affluence. The family was as glad as though the daughter had made a brilliant match, as very frequently she did. The girl was glad, because it meant social success, from the Near-Oriental point of view.

Perhaps she might be sold at once as odalisque, or little housemaid, in some rich household, possibly that of the Padisha himself, where she would perform light services and play in the sunny gardens and be taught music and dancing and intellectual accomplishments. Perhaps the merchant, seeing greater possibilities of profit, might have her educated at his own expense up to the time of her maturity. She was not degraded physically. One does not smirch a priceless pearl or drive in a coster-cart a filly that may one day win the Grand Prix. No, her lot was destined to be an easy one, for the Turks, as husbands, are proverbial for their kindness and indulgence to their womenkind.

Such a girl was that lovely maiden, Roxana, daughter of a herder of Tiflis. She had been since her tenth year of the household of Abdul Hamid, who was related to Hamid Pasha, and who had given him the little girl not long before his deposition. Hamid Pasha had planted her in his garden as one might plant a lovely flower, and watched

her bloom with the same deep poetic appreciation.

But what of Roxana? Where did she as an individual enter into the general scheme of things? What of her soul and her highly active intelligence?

Up to this time neither had suffered. Lessons of various sorts had occupied her mind healthfully and sufficiently; she had been taught music, dancing, and two languages besides her own — French and English, which she spoke charmingly. Then, if truth is to be told, she was rather lazy and luxurious physically, though mentally active enough. She was also devout and prayed in the mosque frequently. But one thing lacked her, and that was love. The girl was as ripe for love as a sun-kissed pomegranate for the plucking.

Consequently, as she looked at Ruggles, late salesman of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America, and saw the light of admiration in his clear blue eyes, strange tremors seized Roxana. As she understood the situation, she was his. She had been left him by Hamid Pasha, together with other real and personal property. He might take her with the others to Paris or any other place, but after her first glance, Roxana much preferred that he should take her for himself. She thought him very beautiful and a hero. Perhaps she was not so far wrong. Ruggles was handsome, and certainly a hero, if standing stubbornly with an empty rifle and lunging viciously with its fixed bayonet at a swarm of

frenzied Bulgarians who, in their mad blood-lust, would have slaughtered his colonel, can make a man such. Hamid Pasha had not been sparing in his praise of Ruggles.

Then Roxana had just seen that he was kind — too kind for her jealous taste. For the moment, she hated Rosa.

Ruggles, quite unconscious of the sudden passion that he had aroused in the hot heart of this mountain goddess, sank down into the chair offered by Miss Elliot and looked about him with a smile.

"Sit down, ladies," said he. "You must n't mind me. I'm still pretty shaky." He glanced over at the divan. "Feeling better, Rosa?" he asked.

The girl slipped from her cushions with the lithe grace of a kitten and crossed the room.

"Yes," she answered, "I am all better — and I will get you a something on which to rest your foot, for you are lamed."

She pushed an ottoman to Ruggles's chair, and, kneeling, raised his ankle, which was still bandaged, and shoved the cushion beneath it. Then she looked up at the young man with a smile.

"That is more comforting?" she asked.

"Yes, that's more comforting," Ruggles answered, smiling back at her.

At a nod from Miss Elliot, Alessandra and Bulbul had seated themselves, primly arranging their skirts. Roxana, however, remained standing, her

tawny eyes glowing at Rosa. She was wondering why she had been so stupid as not to think of the ottoman. All of her short life she had been trained to please some lord and master, and here was this child from Cyprus forethinking her! She should get a good slap or a twisted pinch for that, at bedtime.

"Sit down, Roxana," said Miss Elliot.

Roxana turned slowly and looked at the governess from under her long fringe of lashes.

"I like better to stand," said she in a silken voice that held a trace of sullenness.

"As you wish, my dear," said Miss Elliot evenly. She looked at Ruggles. "Don't you think that the girls' gowns are pretty?" she asked.

"They're great," Ruggles answered. "The ladies look like they'd just stepped off the Rue de la Paix."

Roxana passed slowly in front of him, walking with the lithe, clinging step of a lioness, the foot about to leave the ground drawn deliberately by the extended hip. Her straight shoulders were carried back, her proud bosom thrust forward, and as she passed in front of Ruggles, she looked at him aslant from beneath her long, curved lashes. No trained cloak model in any of the big dressmakers' shops could have shown a gown more deliberately or with better effect. But in Roxana's act there was something almost savagely primitive. She wished notice and admiration for her new gown and herself, and therefore went calmly to work to get it. She was

quite successful, and her eyes glowed as she observed the effect she had produced upon the new master.

Miss Elliot's brows contracted slightly. "Show Mr. Ruggles your gowns, also, my dears," said she to Alessandra and Bulbul.

These two damsels, nothing loath, sprang to their feet and passed in review, though not with the majestic grace of their companion. Bulbul stifled a little giggle and turned away her pretty, soft-featured face. Rosa, who had quite recovered from her wave of emotion, sprang from the divan.

"I shall show mine, too," she cried eagerly, and began to march up and down, so trying to imitate Roxana that the others, even to the fair Caucasian, burst into peals of laughter.

Rosa did not seem to mind. "Is it not pretty, Ruggles Effendi?"

"It certainly is," Ruggles answered heartily, "just like the young lady that's wearing it." He looked at Miss Elliot, "My, but won't they make the Avenue du Bois sit up!"

"Too much so, I'm afraid," she answered, with a rather troubled face.

"Must we veil our faces in Paris?" Roxana asked.

"Not unless you attract too much attention," said Miss Elliot.

"That's it," said Ruggles. "If people stare, you must act like you did not notice them."

Roxana looked rather pensive. Miss Elliot ordered tea, and the awe inspired by Ruggles being by this time entirely overcome, all were soon chatting most naturally. The young man found it difficult to believe that he was being entertained in a Turkish harem. At the end of half an hour, he rose to take his leave, shaking hands with each in turn. Roxana's little finger-tips felt cold as they rested for a moment in his palm. This ceremony was a novel experience to her and awakened odd emotions. At the door, Ruggles turned to Miss Elliot.

"Would you mind walking as far as the house with me?" he asked. "There are one or two things I'd like to talk to you about."

She hesitated for an instant, then agreed. Telling the girls to proceed with their fittings, she went out with Ruggles, who said at the end of a few halting steps: —

"Say, Miss Elliot, I hope you did n't really mean what you said about leaving us?"

"I most assuredly did mean it," she answered, in her low-pitched voice, "but I'm beginning to think that I spoke hastily. Your persistence made me very angry. I'm not accustomed to having my authority overruled; but as you say, yours is greater than my own, so I suppose that I must make the best of it, if you really want me to remain."

"Of course I do. We could n't get along without you, and you've certainly done wonders. Who'd

ever think that those nice, bright, ladylike girls had been little better than slaves? I can't somehow get it through my head. Why, they might be out of a convent instead of a harem."

"They have always been carefully guarded," said Miss Elliot. "Turkish harem life is not what most people suppose, Mr. Ruggles — that is, nowadays. But I'm afraid that Roxana is going to be a handful. Sometimes she makes me feel as though I were training a sleepy, well-fed young lioness which had not yet learned the strength in her teeth and claws."

"Well," said Ruggles, "with her looks and education and a million francs dot, I don't believe we'll have her very long on our hands. We'll get her safely married and after that it'll be up to her husband."

"What is troubling me," Miss Elliot answered, "is just how we are to go about it to find them the right sort of husbands."

"I've been thinking about that, too," said Ruggles. "When I reach Paris I'll see Mr. Falconer, that I spoke about the other day. He's a fine old gentleman and knows everybody. He'll help us, I know; introduce the girls to some nice people and get them invitations and all that. Then Pembroke has offered to give me some letters to friends of his. With two such backers as Mr. Falconer and Lord Pembroke, we can't go wrong."

"So it seems to me," Miss Elliot replied. "Then

I can get some letters, too, from the superintendent of Robert College."

"How long have you been out here?" Ruggles asked.

"Nearly four years. During my senior year at Vassar there was a competitive examination to fill a vacancy on the staff of teachers at Robert and I was fortunate enough to win it. Girls tried for it from several of our American colleges. What helped me was that I'd taken an elective course in Oriental languages and had chosen Arabic, because at that time I was engaged to be married to a man who was in the consular service and stationed at — at — on the Barbary Coast —" Her color heightened.

"Really?" Ruggles shot her a curious look and asked, bluntly: "Why did n't you get married?"

Miss Elliot pushed out her square little chin. "He jilted me," she answered, looking straight in front of her, "for a rich American girl he met on the ship when he was on his way back to America to marry me."

Ruggles stopped short and stood for a moment leaning on his stick.

"Then all I can say is that he could n't have been much loss," he answered slowly. "All the same, it's pretty tough. I've been up against something a good deal the same sort. There was a girl in Paris I thought an awful lot about who turned me down when she found out that I was selling shoes for a

living. I had n't told her just what my job was because I was expecting every day to get the managership of the company's Vienna business. But even if I had it would n't have made any difference. Why, you 'd thought from the way she talked that the shoe business was worse than running a dive. Believe me, Miss Elliot, I never got such a jolt in all my life. Then, just as if that was n't enough, the company turned me down and gave the managership to a skunk that pretended to be my friend, but was working all the time to do me out of the job. That put me all off — and I went around to the shop and made a fool of myself. Lord Pembroke saw it all and stood by me and brought me out here with him."

Miss Elliot listened to this confession with the deepest interest. She had often wondered just what train of circumstances had brought Ruggles out to the Orient; also, who and what he really was. She had wondered also how it happened that he spoke such good French, for during his delirium Ruggles had babbled steadily in this tongue of a certain Ruth, the gist of his incoherent discourse being apparently an anxiety lest she think ill of him for his having got mixed up in some sort of a brawl.

"Once or twice in your fever you mentioned a girl named Ruth," said Miss Elliot, watching him narrowly. The sudden glow of emotion in Ruggles's face did not escape her.

"Oh, that's not the same one," he answered

quickly. "That was Ruth Downing, the daughter of our president of the Walkeasy Shoe Company" — Ruggles still used unconsciously the plural possessive in speaking of the company. "Let me tell you, Miss Elliot, when *she* was made, they only turned out the one model and then broke the mould. Honestly, I don't believe there's another like her in the world."

Miss Elliot smiled. "I'm afraid you're in love with her," said she.

"In love with Ruth Downing?" Ruggles looked shocked — almost frightened. Then his transparent skin was suffused by a sudden flush. "Say, Miss Elliot, maybe you're right. But if I *am* in love with her, it's the same way that I love the sun — or one of those big roses in that old garden over there. Nobody could help but love Ruth Downing." He sighed, deeply.

"Then why not tell her so?" asked Miss Elliot. "If you love her as much as all that, why not take your courage in both hands and go in like a man to win her? She'll marry somebody, some day. Why should n't it be you?"

Ruggles stopped short and leaned on his stick, breathing rapidly.

"Hold on, Miss Elliot," he muttered huskily. "Don't put ideas like that into my head. I'm not husky enough, just yet."

CHAPTER XVI

ATTENDED by the faithful Mustapha and Emilio, the late Hamid Pasha's Italian chef, Ruggles landed at Marseilles and took the train for Paris. It was in early June and the gay capital was at its most brilliant season.

Ruggles went directly to the Carlton, to which hotel he had telegraphed for accommodation for himself and two menservants. Thence his first move was to call at the banking house which was the Paris correspondent of that which had for many years governed the affairs of the late Hamid Pasha, and establish his identity; no difficult task, the necessary papers and signatures having been already forwarded. Ruggles was amazed to discover how very easily everything is managed for a millionaire.

His next step was to visit an automobile palace on the Avenue des Champs Élysées, where he explained his immediate need of a large, six-cylinder limousine car of the latest vintage, to be delivered immediately and paid for in cash. This want was supplied as though he had rubbed Aladdin's lamp with the ring. A capable chauffeur came tumbling down from the blue, landing on the driver's seat so gently as not to break an egg. Ruggles's knowledge of motors, *chassis*, and *carrosseries* was precisely

the same as it was of locomotives. He had seen a great many of both pass at varying rates of speed. When asked if he might not prefer to order the *chassis* and have the *carrosserie* constructed to his taste, he answered that his needs were pressing and that the show car in the window looked perfectly good to him.

But hotel people and merchants were a bit too clever when they came to stencil Ruggles as the crown prince of some American pork, pastry, or pickle king. Just when they thought to have "got his number" (as Ruggles would have expressed it) came Mustapha in sober black and a fez. "You are tired, effendi," quoth he, "it is time to rest." Ruggles allowed himself to be guided by this faithful servant, for a very little exhausted him.

He wrote to Mr. Falconer asking for permission to call upon him, and received from the old gentleman a kindly note making an appointment. In it Mr. Falconer said that he had received a letter from Pembroke telling him of the manner in which Ruggles had distinguished himself and of his change of fortune. He congratulated Ruggles most warmly, and expressed himself as impatient to hear more of the details from his own lips.

In the urgency of his immediate affairs, Ruggles made no attempt to see Darthea or Miss Challand, but a great surprise from another quarter was in store for him. He had come into the hotel rather tired from an afternoon's shopping, and was lean-

ing on his stick waiting for the lift, when a quiet, low-pitched voice at his elbow said: —

"How do you do, Mr. Ruggles?"

Ruggles started so violently that his stout walking stick slipped on the polished parquet, and his injured ankle, being as yet unable to support the sudden strain thus thrown upon it, gave under him and he fell. An attendant sprang to his assistance, and as he struggled to his feet with a face pale from shock and the sudden twinge of pain in the wounded ankle, he looked into the violet eyes of Ruth, who was watching him with a curious, startled expression, surprised at the effect of her quiet greeting and a trifle vexed at his apparent awkwardness.

The blood rushed back into Ruggles's face as he took the small gloved hand which she gravely offered him.

"How do you do, Miss Downing?" he answered, in some confusion. "I did n't know that you were in Paris."

"My aunt and I have just got here from London," she answered. "We are only over for a few days to do some shopping. And how have you been since we last met?"

"Oh — pretty well, thank you," Ruggles replied, a little vaguely. "I'm just back from Turkey."

"From Turkey!" she echoed, slightly raising her eyebrows.

"Yes," Ruggles answered. "I went out there the day after — after I saw you here, with a doctor in the Red Cross — Lord Pembroke."

"Really?" Her eyes examined him with a sudden, intense interest. "Did you serve with the Red Cross?"

"Yes," Ruggles answered; "that is, until I got wounded. I got shot in the ankle on the Tschataldscha lines."

Ruth glanced down instinctively, and as she saw the manner in which Ruggles was supporting himself, her face softened.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she said, and raised her eyes to his face. "I must hear all about it. Can't you come up for a few minutes? My aunt is resting, and we can have a little chat before tea time. Or have you come to call on somebody —?"

"Oh, no," Ruggles answered. "I'm stopping here."

Ruth did not show the surprise that this announcement gave her. She reflected quickly that some considerable change must have occurred in Ruggles's affairs, to enable him to afford the Carlton. Then it occurred to her that he might possibly be in the service of some Ottoman official, as on her arrival at the hotel she had noticed a Turkish manservant in a fez sitting beside the chauffeur of a waiting motor-car.

Ruth, however, was no snob, and whether Ruggles was in some form of menial service or not made

not the slightest difference. He had interested her from the first. She had liked and admired him for his absolute naturalness and his generally clean and wholesome type, and he had impressed her with those three cardinal qualities which perhaps of all others make their greatest appeal to a woman when she finds them in a man, — kindness, constancy, and courage. So, regardless of what anybody might choose to think, she repeated her invitation and they went up together in the lift and into the same little private salon in the suite that was reserved for members of the Downing family who found themselves in Paris.

"Sit right down and put your foot on this thing," said Ruth, hauling an armchair from its corner and pushing an ottoman in front of it. Ruggles's limping gait had not escaped her. "Did you wrench your ankle when your cane slipped?"

"Oh, no," said Ruggles. "It just went out from under me. Pembroke says that I'll limp for the rest of my life. No more bicycling for me, I guess," he added a little wistfully; then hastened to say: "I've got no kick coming, though. It was worth it."

"What was worth it?" asked Ruth, and dropped into a chair facing him.

"Why — everything that happened afterwards — and a whole lot that had happened before. We did some pretty good work out there. That is, Pembroke did — and I helped."

"Who is Pembroke? Ruth asked. "You spoke

of him downstairs as 'Lord Pembroke.' How did you get to know him?"

"Well, it was like this," said Ruggles; "after I left you that day, I went home and found a letter from the European general manager saying that the company had decided to give the managership of the Vienna store to another man — a fellow named Lorenz, who had been in the shoe business in Vienna and knew the trade. Maybe he was a better man for the job than I was, but I felt awful sore about it, because I felt that the company had as good as promised it to me."

"I don't blame you," said Ruth, who, by certain subtle methods of her own, had sifted the affair quite to the bottom and knew almost as much about it as Ruggles himself. But she wanted to hear his version and, dropping her chin in her hand, she fixed her thoughtful sapphire eyes on his face and encouraged him to talk.

"Coming just as it did," said Ruggles, "made me sick, clear through. You see, it sort of put me in a bad light with people who thought that I was trying to bluff them about my real position with the company. So I made up my mind to quit the company then and there, but before I left, I wanted to tell that lying Durand, the manager of the Paris store, just what I thought of him, — and I wanted to tell Lorenz, too. Both of them had pretended to be good friends of mine, and all the while they'd been working behind my back to do me out of the

job. So I went into the store and told them. All I intended to do was just that. I had no more idea of starting anything than I would have of getting into a fight here in the office of this hotel. I thought too much of the company for that."

"Who began the row?" Ruth asked, never taking her eyes from Ruggles's face.

"Lorenz did. He could n't stand for what I said to him and grabbed me by the arm and tried to throw me out. Then suddenly I saw red, and when Durand and Wagner and I don't know who else butted in, I guess I just ran amuck, and started to clean out the place. I don't seem to remember just what did happen. But there was a man in the store that I 'd met that morning on the Avenue du Bois, and he got me out of the place and took me to the Madrid for lunch. Well, it turned out that he was Lord Pembroke, an English surgeon, on his way out to Turkey to work with the Red Cross. I managed to persuade him to take me on as his orderly — and I 've been out there ever since."

"Are you his orderly still?" Ruth asked.

Ruggles smiled. "No," said he. "I might be, though, if it had n't been for one of those things that can only happen in war, I guess. Pembroke had rigged up a field hospital, scarcely more than a dressing-station, out on the Tschataldscha lines, and we were hard at work there one night when the colonel in command, a fine old Turk named Hamid Pasha, sent word that he was just starting out to

make his rounds and thought Pembroke might like to go with him. But Pembroke was mighty busy, so he sent me along to see if there were many wounded that had n't been brought in. Well, we were inspecting one of the outposts when a bunch of Bulgarians rushed it. Most of our horses were killed at the first volley, and the colonel's fell on top of him. I happened to see it and got to him and dragged him out from under it. We had some pretty tough hand-to-hand fighting for a few minutes, and then a gang of our infantry made a bayonet charge and drove the Bulgarians back. I did n't know anything about that part of it, as I 'd got a crack across the head with the butt of a rifle. The colonel was shot through the body, and I 'd got my ankle smashed by a bullet and a bayonet stuck through my arm and one or two other wounds, and was all in."

"I should think that you might have been!" said Ruth. Her tone was dry, but her eyes were glowing and her breath coming quickly. "And what then?"

"Well," said Ruggles, "Pembroke managed to pull the colonel through for the time being, but he was a pretty old man and it was plain that his wound was n't going to heal, and he said he 'd rather die in his own house. He 'd got it into his head that if it had n't been for me, he might have been butchered by the Bulgarians; so nothing would do but he must take me with him. He was one of the richest men in Turkey, and lived in what

had once been one of the royal palaces on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. We were there about three months, and then Hamid Pasha died. I was all broken up, because he'd been just like a father to me." The tears came to Ruggles's eyes. "And what do you suppose he'd gone and done? He'd made me one of his heirs and left me the palace and everything in it and half a million pounds in money and securities."

Ruth sprang forward in her chair, her face aglow.

"Half a million pounds!" she cried. "Why, that's — that's about two and a half million dollars!"

Ruggles nodded. "Yes," said he. "It's an awful lot of money for an ordinary chap like me, ain't it?"

Ruth clasped her hands and stared at him for an instant, with her chin resting on her knuckles.

"Oh — I'm so glad — *so* glad!" said she. "I congratulate you with all my heart!"

She gave him her hand. Ruggles clasped it in his firm grip, and they sat for a moment looking into each other's eyes. Then Ruth, her face very pale, released her hand gently and settled herself back in her chair.

"Thank you, Miss Downing," said Ruggles. "I thought you'd be glad."

"It's the most wonderful story I ever heard!" said Ruth a little breathlessly, for that warm handclasp had stirred within her some new and very powerful emotion that startled and rather bewil-

dered her. No doubt the simple, modest narrative preceding it had had a good deal to do with this. For Ruth had a vivid imagination, and as Ruggles had talked, she had been supplying in her mind the color that was lacking in the tale as he told it. That subtle wireless which exists between two people who are in sympathy had been highly active, and it is probable that Ruth's mental picture of the incident was not far wrong.

"You have n't heard the most wonderful part of it yet," said Ruggles, with a faint smile. "I guess the best way for you to understand that is to read the letter that Hamid Pasha left me."

He drew from his pocket a long wallet of morocco leather and, taking therefrom the letter of his benefactor, handed it to the girl. Ruth opened it and read, while Ruggles leaned back in his chair and watched with tender amusement and admiration the changing shades of color and complexion in her lovely face. Ruth's eyes opened wider and wider as she continued her perusal, and when she had finished, she let the letter fall upon her knee and for a full ten seconds — which is a long time under certain circumstances — stared at Ruggles, dumb and amazed. The look in her face suggested that of a little girl of ten astonished by the sudden presentation of some phenomenon quite beyond the limits of her childish imagination, and her words, when she spoke, were precisely such as the same little girl might have uttered.

"Richard Ruggles!" she gasped then. "Well, did I ever hear the like!"

"You can imagine how it jolted me," said Ruggles, smiling. "It brought back my fever and I went to bed for another two weeks and liked to have cashed in, they tell me. But after I'd talked to Miss Elliot —"

"Who is Miss Elliot?" Ruth demanded. "Tell me all about it. Tell me everything."

So Ruggles, in his brief yet comprehensive way, which included all important details while obliterative of himself, described his visit to the *haremlik* and the girls and Miss Elliot and their plans for the future, while Ruth, her eyes scarcely leaving his face, followed his words in a silence as fascinated as that of Desdemona listening to the "strange tales" of Othello the Moor. She did not interrupt until Ruggles told her that he was going to see Mr. Falconer to ask for the aid and advice of that kindly and worldly-wise old gentleman.

"The very person!" Ruth exclaimed, and was about to say more when there came a discreet rap.

Ruth sprang up to open the door, and there stood Mustapha, who saluted in the Turkish fashion, an inclination with the hand carried to the forehead, the lips, and the chest.

"What is it, Mustapha?" asked Ruggles, who was sitting with his face to the door.

"A note from Mr. Falconer, effendi, just brought by his servant and asking for a reply."

Excusing himself to Ruth, Ruggles opened the note, glanced it through, then laughed.

"That's funny," said he; "just as we happened to be speaking about him. He wants to know if I can go to luncheon at his apartment to-morrow and he says: 'I am asking Miss Challand and her niece and the Misses Downing, aunt and niece, the latter of whom have promised to honor me.'"

Ruth laughed. "I was just going to tell you that we were lunching with Mr. Falconer to-morrow," said she. "You can go, can't you?"

"Yes," Ruggles answered slowly. "I'd liked to have called on Miss Challand first, though, just to show that there is no hard feeling."

"Miss Challand?" asked Ruth questioningly.

"Yes. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, of course!" said Ruth. "She and her niece are those catty Englishwomen who tried to snub you when they found out that you were a clerk in the store. What fun!"

"I never saw where the fun came in," said Ruggles, "but I s'pose I might as well go."

"There's a desk in the corner," said Ruth. "Drop a line to Mr. Falconer to say that you'll go."

Ruggles obediently complied and gave the note to Mustapha, who saluted again and withdrew. Ruth closed the door and looked at Ruggles with sparkling eyes.

"It's like a play," said she. "Are n't you awfully excited at the thought of seeing your Darthea again

— now that you're a hero and a millionaire with a Turkish valet who calls you 'Effendi'? By the way, would n't you like some tea, Ruggles Effendi?"

Ruggles looked at her and laughed. It was very nice to be teased by Ruth in this bantering way.

"I'm more used to Turkish coffee," said he.

"Oh, I adore Turkish coffee!" cried Ruth. "Do you suppose they can make it properly here?"

"Mustapha can," said Ruggles. "He's got a whole outfit and makes it for me every day about this time. S'pose I 'phone down to the office and tell 'em to send him up?"

Ruth struck her little palms together. "Just the thing," said she. "But tell me, first, are you very much excited at the thought of seeing Darthea?"

"No," Ruggles answered. "Why should I be?"

"Well, you were pretty sore when she turned you down, were n't you? And now that you've made good —"

"Look here, Miss Downing," Ruggles interrupted, "I don't consider for a second that I've made good. Making good, as I see it, comes of plugging along at your job, doing the best you can to learn the business and to fit yourself for the next grade, until you get to the top. That was my idea when I was with the company. I meant to get to the top, some day, even if I had to jump a few steps, and if I had n't made a fool of myself I'd have done it, too. Then, when I'd got to the top I could have looked back and said: 'I've made good.'

But men that make a lot of money in some sort of a gamble — like stocks or striking oil or gold, or a lucky deal of any sort — can't say that they've made good. They've just been fortunate, that's all."

"Then you really don't think that you deserve your own good fortune?" Ruth asked.

"Not yet," Ruggles answered. "I've still got to make good just as much as ever. I've got to carry out Hamid Pasha's ideas about those girls; and if I manage to do that, I've still got to do something else to earn the right to enjoy what I've got. Just because you happen to come out on top in a fight does n't mean anything. I guess I came out on top in that fight in the store, but nobody was going to leave me a fortune for it. And not long afterwards I managed to pull through a fight on the Tschataldscha lines and inherit two and a half million dollars for it. Where does the making good come in, I'd like to know?"

Ruth appeared to ponder this problem for a moment, then said: —

"I suppose that when you learned that Lorenz had got the place that you were counting on, it never occurred to you that perhaps the company had something better for you than the managership of the Vienna store?"

"No," said Ruggles; "of course it had n't."

"It had, though," Ruth retorted. "I happen to know that Lorenz got the position because there

was a lot of doubt about our goods being able to compete with the 'made-in-Germany' stuff, and it was thought better to have a local man in charge. It may comfort you to know that up to this time the store has been losing money right along."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that," said Ruggles, but his expression rather gave the lie to his words. "Who told you so?"

"Mr. Hastings. I saw him in London. He knew all about you and your record with the company, and told me that he intended to give you charge of the new big store in Rome, which was almost sure to prove a success if properly handled. You see, he did n't want to give you a detail which seemed foredoomed to failure."

Ruggles sat up straight in his chair. "Then why could n't he have said so?" he demanded.

Ruth shrugged her pretty shoulders. "I don't know," she answered. "Maybe he wanted to test your loyalty to the company."

This information of Ruth's was true, in the main. After seeing Ruggles, she had questioned her father, who had told her that the immediate success of a Vienna branch was very uncertain, but that Mr. Hastings had fixed on a man in the employ of the company who seemed to be the person best qualified to make it go, were this possible. Mr. Downing, who liked to talk business with his children (as what man does not when these children are actively and intelligently interested in his affairs), had gone on

to say that the company proposed to open a big retail store in Rome and that Mr. Hastings had recommended as manager of this establishment a young man named Ruggles who had been for some years with the company and whose father Mr. Downing remembered as one of their factory employees who had invented some very excellent machines for shaping and stitching shoes. Ruth, on receiving this information, had told her family about Ruggles, and Mr. Downing had readily promised that he should have the position. As they were leaving Paris the following day, Ruth had gone to the store to tell Ruggles of what he might expect — and arrived in time to see him whisked away by Pembroke.

Ruggles, knowing nothing of all this, received her information with a certain amount of skepticism.

"Well, it strikes me that 's a poor sort of way to test a man," said he. "Any fellow that would keep on plugging away at his job after a jolt like that might as well make up his mind to stick to the same job for the rest of his life. He would n't deserve to get on."

Ruth nodded. "I 'm inclined to agree with you," said she. "When you found that the company had gone back on you, I suppose you lost your faith in the whole business — the Downing family and all."

"No," said Ruggles slowly. "I never for a moment felt any different about you and your father

and Dick. If Dick had been here, I would have gone to him and asked for a square deal. But I did n't want to bother your father, and I certainly was n't going to cry-baby to you, especially when you 'd been so good to me and given me your picture."

"What 's become of the picture?" Ruth asked, looking at him through narrowed lashes.

Ruggles smiled. "Did you notice just now when you opened the door how Mustapha looked away the second he saw your face?" he asked.

"Yes. Why did he do that?"

"Because he recognized you from the picture. I 'll bet you that when I send for him to make our coffee he 'll never once look your way. He thinks that you 're like my patron saint, and — well" — the color poured into Ruggles's face — "I guess maybe he 's about right. He 'd think it was sort of sacrilegious to look at you. I 've felt that way, sometimes, about the picture. One night in the emergency hospital, when I was saying my prayers before I turned in, a Turkish orderly came to give me a message from Pembroke. He did n't disturb me, because the Turks have got a lot of respect for anybody's religion, even if it ain't their own, but he went back and told Pembroke that he 'd get me a few minutes later when I 'd finished praying to the beautiful lady."

Ruth raised her hand to her bosom. Young as she was, a good many men had tried to make love

to her, but to undergo an apotheosis was a distinctly new experience.

"Do you still say your prayers before going to bed?" she asked.

"'Most always," Ruggles answered. "My mother and father were both pretty religious, and they got me into the habit. That picture of yours has helped me a lot, Miss Downing," Ruggles went on. "It's sort of given me something to live up to and try to be worthy of. When I was laid up in Hamid Pasha's house, I kept it in the drawer of the table at the head of my bed, and when I was feeling pretty bad, I used to take it out and look at it, and it used to brace me up and keep me from losing my nerve — especially after Pembroke had got through dressing my ankle. I used to think that I'd rather die and have it over with than have any more bone gouged out —"

"Oh — don't!" cried Ruth, looking at him with brimming eyes. She wondered if Ruggles had any realization that he was telling her of such a love as no other man had ever found words to express to her.

"I beg your pardon," said Ruggles. "I did n't mean to upset you — but I just wanted you to know what you and your picture had done for me. I'll call up the office now and tell them to send Mustapha."

CHAPTER XVII

In his cordial note of invitation to luncheon, Mr. Falconer had suggested that Ruggles come to his apartment an hour early, in order that they might have an opportunity to talk before the arrival of the other guests. Ruggles was glad to comply with this suggestion, and was warmly greeted by the kindly old gentleman.

"My dear young friend," said he, beaming at Ruggles over the tops of his shell-rimmed *pince-nez*, "I'm delighted to see you. Pembroke gave me the most of your news, but I am most anxious to hear the tale from your own lips. Do sit down. You are still lame, I see."

"Oh, I guess I'll limp for the rest of my life," Ruggles answered. "Thank you ever so much for your kindness, Mr. Falconer."

"Not a bit of it. A great pleasure, I assure you. I was deeply grieved to hear of the death of my esteemed friend, Colonel Hamid Pasha. I knew him intimately some years ago when he was in the diplomatic service of his country."

Ruggles smiled and nodded. "The day before his death," said he, "I was reading to him from the copy of Swinburne which you gave him. He often spoke of you and of how much pleasure he had got from your present."

Mr. Falconer seemed much affected. "Dear me — is that really so? But do tell me your story. Pembroke's letter left me quite bewildered."

They settled themselves comfortably, and Ruggles proceeded with his narrative, describing his experiences and presenting mind pictures with an unconscious ability. The texture of Ruggles's discourse contained no holes; no dropped stitches whereof the warp or the woof required to be followed back, unraveled and knotted. There were no questions to be asked; merely one or two which needed to be answered. The essential one Ruggles emphasized according to its proper value; namely, that of social status.

"Believe me, Mr. Falconer," said he, earnestly, "these girls are all right. They're just as nice as they can be. The only thing is, will people believe it when they know that they have grown up in a Turkish harem? The sound of that sort of puts you off. Folks don't understand that a harem can be just as nice as any Christian home, if it's managed like it ought to be. Hamid Pasha was a man a good deal like you; kind and gentle and religious. Say, Mr. Falconer, what difference does it make when a man is a good man whether he speaks of God as 'Allah' or 'Buddha,' or any other word which means the same thing in his language?"

"As I grow older," answered Mr. Falconer, "the distinction becomes less and less. The Osmanli Turks are perhaps the most religious people in the

world, for the simple reason that they respect the religions of others. I have visited Constantinople and I was profoundly impressed at seeing how in the mosque at Eyub Sultan the mosaics depicting the life of Christ had been not only preserved but carefully protected. I can think of no other creed which would have been so liberal to the pictorial commemoration of an alien faith. As for our late esteemed friend, Hamid Pasha, he was simply a devout man unshackled by the tenets of any orthodox religion. H'm — h'm — so two of these young ladies are Mohammedans and two profess Christianity? H'm — that point may be considered later. From what you tell me, I am sure that Hamid Pasha would have placed no restrictions on their religious freedom of thought. But as you point out, their temporal development depends at this moment principally upon the social lines along which it may be directed."

Ruggles wondered if there had ever been so wise a man as Mr. Falconer, and he blessed the fate which had brought them together.

"That's the way it strikes me," he answered. "Just as Pembroke says, they've got to meet the right sort of people. Why should n't they, anyhow? They're Hamid Pasha's adopted daughters and he was a man that stood mighty high. We've arranged that they're going to take his full name; Ben Ali Hamid."

"Quite so," said Mr. Falconer.

"The trouble is," said Ruggles, "to get them started right."

"I do not think there should be much difficulty in that respect," Mr. Falconer replied. "With such credentials as you have at your disposal, it should be an easy matter to see the young ladies properly introduced. Of course, my dear fellow, you may count entirely upon my own poor efforts—" He raised his hand. "Don't thank me. It is an insignificant service, which I am only too happy to render to the memory of a friend whom I greatly esteemed. What I was about to say is that our difficulties" — Ruggles noted the plural possessive and his heart went out to Mr. Falconer — "are more apt to lie in limiting the circle than in enlarging it. With such uncommon beauty as you describe and a dot of a million francs apiece, they are apt to be a lure for all sorts of fortune hunters."

"I guess that Miss Elliot and I can manage to head off that crowd," said Ruggles cheerfully. "Besides, they've got to get my consent to marry if they want to get their dots."

Mr. Falconer nodded. "Quite so," said he. "Now, in regard to this question of a chaperon. Have you had anybody in mind?"

Ruggles flushed. "I thought of Miss Challand, sir," he answered, "if you think she'd care to do it."

Mr. Falconer struck his hands together. "The very person!" said he. "But then how about her

niece?" And he looked at Ruggles so keenly that the boy blushed, for he read the double question.

"Oh, that need n't interfere," said Ruggles, with a faint flush. "Miss Westbrooke could live with us, too. It would be a good thing for the girls to have such a nice companion. You see, Miss Elliot is a lady and all that, but, after all, she's a paid governess."

"I'm afraid, though," said Mr. Falconer, "that Miss Westbrooke might object to becoming your constant guest — especially after the rather shabby way in which she treated you. She has since told me that she regretted her behavior in that respect."

Ruggles's face brightened. "I'm mighty glad to hear that," said he. "After all, it was my own fault. I ought to have told her just what my job was. Believe me, Mr. Falconer," — he leaned forward and looked earnestly into the kindly, paternal face, — "I've learned a lot about people and things in the last twelve months. When I was selling shoes for a living I thought that I was just as good as anybody, but I've learned different since. I know that I'm nowhere near in the same class with you and Lord Pembroke and Miss Challand and Darthea and — and the Downings, and that my having a lot of money and a palace and a Turkish decoration don't make the least bit of difference. Blood is blood, I guess, in people just as much as in dogs and horses and cattle, or anything else."

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Falconer,

"we are all equal in God's sight, and if some of us have enjoyed advantages of birth and education and the association with distinguished people, then so much greater become our responsibilities toward others less blessed in similar advantages. But the thinking person of any class or caste whatever learns more and more that true aristocracy lies not in culture or crowns or coronets, or the amount to which he may be able to fill his check. The Great Aristocrat was Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph the carpenter, who suffered crucifixion that his example might benefit the world. Whoso tries earnestly to follow his precepts, whether he be of high or low degree, rich or poor, is a true aristocrat. There is the aristocracy of birth, the aristocracy of wealth, the aristocracy of health, but these are nothing as compared to the aristocracy of soul. You, I am convinced, possess this aristocracy, so do not permit yourself to be dismayed in the face of others whose claims to this caste are material. Go on as you have gone; hold your head high and keep your heart humble." He spread his finely shaped hands and smiled. "As to the questions we have been considering, if you care to have me do so I shall take pleasure in explaining our needs" — again that comforting plural possessive — "to Miss Challand and try to enlist her services. And as to your location, I think that I can be of some assistance there. I know of a very nice property in Neuilly which has recently been offered to

be let or sold. It belongs to a friend of mine, the Comte de Nitry. We might go out and look at it. I am free this afternoon, and if you like I can tell my servant to telephone to say that we are coming."

Ruggles expressed his appreciation of this kindness in a manner which bordered on the emotional.

Ruth and her aunt, Miss Downing, arrived at Mr. Falconer's handsome apartment in advance of Miss Challand and her niece. Ruth had no intention of missing the beginning of the second act of the most interesting drama that had ever fallen within her youthful experience, and one in which, it must be admitted, her heart shared equally with her head. She wanted to see the meeting between Ruggles and the girl who had treated him so — in Ruth's opinion — snobbishly and ungratefully.

In spite of the protests of her aunt, the two ladies arrived ten minutes before the hour set for *déjeuner*, and Ruggles suffered sweet agonies of rapture as Ruth gave him her hand and he looked into her violet eyes. The excitement of the situation had brought a delicate flush to Ruth's cheeks and a vivacity to her manner such as Ruggles had not previously observed. She seemed in some subtle manner nearer to him, less of the goddess and more of the mortal maid. He could not keep his eyes from her.

Promptly upon the hour, Miss Challand and Darthea were ushered in by the stately butler, and, having been greeted by their host and introduced

to the Misses Downing, they turned to Ruggles, who was waiting quietly. Miss Challand, feeling not quite at her ease, was slightly stiff. Darthea's rosy color deepened and her eyes were filled with an intense curiosity. It seemed to her that she had never seen so great a change in a person in so few months. The happy, light-hearted, careless boy had suddenly become a man — and a very attractive man, at that. He was thinner and seemed to have grown taller and his face, which she thought of as rather round and pink and had always been as smooth as a babe's, was now lean, rather pale, with shadows still beneath the eyes, and he had a short, crisp, fair mustache. Formerly, he had worn his yellow hair rather long, especially behind the ears, and had brushed it straight back from his forehead, whereas it was now cropped barely long enough to part, with a ruthless sacrifice of the waving locks on either side.

His dress was different, too, for while always neat and particular in his costume, Ruggles had had but little to spend on clothes. But he had closely observed Pembroke and had tried to get as near as possible the same effect, not only in points of dress and barbering, but in his manner of conducting himself. He might have had a far worse model, and what with Pembroke's natural taste and ease and Ruggles's quick adaptability, the effect was excellent.

But there was something subtler than this.

Ruggles had seen and suffered and been trusted with responsibilities since Darthea had packed him from her haughty presence, while his change of fortune and the respect which it commanded on every side had given him self-confidence. Though as natural as ever and with the same unaffected politeness, he no longer sought constantly to please. He seemed rather one to be pleased.

But if Darthea found a change in Ruggles, then no less did Ruggles see Darthea through different eyes. She was as charming as ever and with the same evident stamp of birth and breeding, but for some reason Ruggles was conscious of a curious sense of disillusionment. Darthea seemed callow, youthful and undeveloped to the point of childishness — and a child that seemed destined to arrive at no other maturity than that of years. He could not help comparing her to such a vital, full-natured girl as Ruth, with her swift understanding and generous sympathy.

The luncheon passed pleasantly, and a little after three Miss Challand and Darthea arose to take their departure. A shower threatened, and Ruggles offered to take them to their destination in his car, which was waiting below. They were going directly home, and after a slight demur Miss Challand accepted his offer.

Mustapha in his black suit and fez, opened the door. As Darthea stepped into the superb limousine, with its luxurious fittings, she was conscious of

a little thrill. Few girls who have not grown up in the lap of luxury are able to remain indifferent to the atmosphere of a powerful automobile. It represents so many things besides mere vulgar wealth, the evidence of which one might find in clothes or jewels or a house. For the car suggests romance, imperious progress, swift motion, a freedom of environment, distant regions, and the spice of danger, all to be achieved while comfortably cuddled in the lap of luxury. It is a sort of magic carpet to waft one from the chill blast of winter winds to the sunny slopes of Olympus or from scorching sidewalks to cool mountain heights. Yachts are all right in their way for those who like the water, which many do not. Besides, if small, they are cramped, and if large, they are dull, and their relations to passing people and things are not so intimate.

Ruggles gave the address to Mustapha, who mounted beside the chauffeur, and they glided off as silently as a gondola.

"What a lovely car," said Darthea.

Ruggles smiled. "Yes," he answered, "it's quite a change from my old bike. It seemed sort of funny, at first, to be riding around in it and knowing that it was my own, but I'm getting used to it now. I guess it does n't take long for anybody to get used to being rich. It's a good deal harder for me to get used to the idea that I've got to limp around with a stick for the rest of my life."

"Is it really as bad as that?" Miss Challand asked.

"So Pembroke says. The bones of my ankle were all smashed up and some taken out. It was a mighty lucky thing for me that Hamid Pasha left me all this money. I don't know how I'd have got along. Speaking of that, Miss Challand, there's something I'd like to talk to you about whenever you can spare the time. It's in connection with finding some lady to act as what Pembroke calls 'resident chaperon' for these girls that I've got on my hands."

"I should be very glad to advise you, I am sure, Mr. Ruggles," said Miss Challand, to whom Mr. Falconer had already described Ruggles's interesting charges and explained his needs for their social education, "but my own acquaintance is rather limited, and at this moment I am unable to think of anybody who might be suitable to your requirements." Miss Challand's tone was a little stiff, but she was secretly pleased and flattered that both Mr. Falconer and Ruggles should have turned to her for advice in this delicate situation. Darthea looked out of the window of the smooth-running limousine.

"Of course," said Ruggles, "it might be sort of disagreeable for a lady to take a regular paid position like this, but I think that she'd find it just like living in her own house. She would n't have to bother about the housekeeping part, of course;

Selim and Sarah and the cook look after all that. You see, my idea is that the girls ought to get acquainted with nice people, like you and Dar — Miss Westbrooke, and other folks whose place in society is like what Hamid Pasha's was. I've got to find some lady like that to give the girls the right sort of a start. They're just as bright as they can be and it won't take long for them to get the idea if they're handled right. We'll be pretty quiet at first," Ruggles went on, "because, while it ain't the custom in Turkey to go into mourning the way we do, still I don't think that it would be quite the thing for the girls to go out much so soon after the death of their adopted father, do you?"

"Indeed, I do not," replied Miss Challand.

"Are n't they going to wear mourning?" Darthea asked.

"Not the way the French do," said Ruggles. "But their dresses are quiet — black and white and sort of simple. Miss Elliot looked after that."

"What is Miss Elliot like?" asked Darthea, still obviously interested in the traffic.

"Oh, she's fine. She's an American girl who went out as a teacher to Robert College. She graduated from Vassar. That's one of the big women's colleges in America. You'd like Miss Elliot. She's finely educated and has a lot of sense and is just as nice and kind as she can be."

Darthea asked a few more questions about Miss

Elliot, then turned her inquiries to the girls, whom Ruggles described in his quiet, natural way.

Seeing that they were approaching their destination, he came to a sudden resolution. "See here, Miss Challand," said he, "I hoped that maybe you might be willing to help me out in this business. I mean, that I thought perhaps you might consider taking charge — and if Miss Westbrooke would come, too, so much the better. Mr. Falconer has been telling me about an old place in Neuilly that seems to be just what I want, and there's a big studio in a wing of the house that would be just the thing for Dar — Miss Westbrooke. I won't say any more about it now, but please think it over. Mr. Falconer's coming to see you, and he'll tell you all about it. Well, here we are."

And Mustapha, with his umbrella, ushered two very much agitated ladies to their door.

CHAPTER XVIII

The old De Nitry place in Neuilly proved to be precisely what Ruggles wanted. The high walls about the grounds enclosed a little park with some fine old trees, a flower garden, a tennis-court, stables, and a garage. The house was spacious and modern within, and there was a pavilion, of which the upper story was a roomy studio.

Ruggles was delighted with the place and lost no time in securing it. Being personally recommended to the family by Mr. Falconer, an honored friend of years' standing, he was enabled to rent the house practically furnished.

In the mean time, Mr. Falconer called upon Miss Challand. At first she would not hear of Ruggles's proposition. Darthea's sense of the bizarre inclined her to favor the idea, but Miss Challand rather resented Mr. Falconer's suggesting such a thing. But when the old gentleman assured her that many women of his acquaintance, quite as well connected as she, were constantly filling such positions — which were, as a matter of fact, only open to people of birth and breeding — Miss Challand began to grow pensive.

For one thing, the lease of their apartment was to expire in the autumn, and they had been informed that the rent was to be raised a third. Miss

Challand had not been able to see just how they were going to be able to afford to remain in Paris, and Darthea was very loath to return to England.

And then the astute old gentleman laid down his best card. Darthea was, of course, expected to remain with her aunt, and Ruggles would feel more than compensated for her entertainment in having before the eyes of his wards such an admirable exponent of what a well-bred young lady should be. If Miss Challand and Darthea would consent to become members of the household, Ruggles would place at their exclusive disposal the pavilion, with its studio, and the apartment connected with it. He described the studio, with its spaciousness and splendid light, and the quiet beauty of the gardens.

Darthea's studio had been her chief despair. It cramped and stifled her. During the winter there were many whole days when she had not the light to work at all. But aside from the question of the studio there were other considerations which inclined Darthea to favor Ruggles's proposition. One was that she knew her aunt to be depriving herself of many necessities of life in order that her niece might not lack for the materials required in her work, such as good colors, canvases, brushes, and the like, all of which are dear when of the best quality. Miss Challand stoutly averred that she felt much better without such luxuries as juicy steaks, cutlets, chicken, sole, and the like, but it was evident to Darthea that her aunt had been for

some time below her robust normal, and the girl ascribed this to the need of the proper amount of nourishing food, well cooked and served. The hope of selling a picture alone had prevented her from economizing in the matter of materials.

The other and lesser consideration was that Darthea had begun to find life deadly dull. Art is not everything, despite what artists claim to believe, and Darthea, being young and full-natured, sadly missed the recreations of most girls of her age. She was intensely interested in Ruggles and his unusual household, and she could not help but reflect on the diversion to be obtained from being a member of such an unusual *ménage*.

So in the end, after many long and intricate arguments, the two ladies gave their official acceptance of Ruggles's offer and were in due time installed in the comfortable pavilion of the De Nitry place.

In due course of time Miss Elliot, with her four interesting charges, arrived in Paris, to be met at the station by Mustapha with the car, Ruggles preferring to welcome the party at the house.

Miss Elliot had also in her suite Selim, that incomparable dragoman and courier, Sarah, and a little ladies' maid of Levantine origin. The five ladies were placed in the limousine and despatched immediately with Mustapha, the other servants following.

Four rather dazed and bewildered damsels offered their slim hands to the smiling Ruggles, though the eyes of one of them were not so amazed that they failed to light with a sudden glow as they looked for a swift instant into those of the master. The girls were then turned over to Sarah, to whom Mustapha had already indicated their apartments.

As they rustled up the marble stairway, whispering one to the other, Miss Elliot turned to Ruggles. Her bright face wore a curious expression of mingled pleasure and perplexity.

"It's stunning — perfectly stunning!" said she, glancing about her at the marble-columned antechamber and the stately chambers that opened off from either side. "Oh, if he could only have foreseen" — And she drew down the corners of her mobile mouth.

"Foreseen what?" Ruggles demanded.

"Come in here somewhere and let me get it off my chest. Where can we be undisturbed for half an hour?"

Rather startled, Ruggles led her into an alcove of the billiard-room, where she sank down upon a heavy Empire armchair, Ruggles seating himself opposite.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

Miss Elliot gave a nervous little laugh and waved her small gloved hands on either side with a comprehending gesture.

"All this," said she.

"All this!" Ruggles echoed, scarcely able to believe his ears; "why, what's the matter with all this?"

"Nothing — except that we don't need it."

"We don't need it. Why don't we need it?"

Miss Elliot stared for a moment at his round, astonished eyes, then dropped her face into her hands and her pretty shoulders began to shake. Ruggles gasped at her, too bewildered to speak. Miss Elliot's shoulders shook harder and she began to gasp.

"Say," said Ruggles solicitously, "don't do that. Here — stop it. What's struck you, anyhow?"

The only answer was a more violent convulsion. Ruggles reached out one arm, seized her wrist, and gave it a tug. Miss Elliot straightened up and looked at him with a flushed face and sparkling eyes. The gasping ceased.

"Why don't we need it?" Ruggles repeated.

"Because — because — *they're — all engaged!*"

"Wh-what?"

She nodded. "That is, they will be as soon as you give your official consent," said she, "and there's no reason I can see why you should n't."

"Gee!" Ruggles leaned back in his chair, speechless. "How engaged? Engaged to what?"

"Engaged to be married," retorted Miss Elliot, "and to four very desirable young men. Now, listen, while I check 'em off. First, there's Roxana. Who do you think wants to marry her?"

"Search me."

"Pembroke."

"*P-P-P-Pembroke* —"

"No less. He got to coming over pretty often after you left, and as he was so nice, and had been a sort of an executor, as you might say, I got in the habit of asking him for tea at the kiosk. To tell the truth,"—she drew down the corners of her mouth, — "I rather got the idea that he was interested in *me*."

"In *you!*" Ruggles's tone was not the height of flattery.

"Well, you need n't be so terribly complimentary. He'd been awfully nice to me, and I began to get ideas. But no such luck. He came to look at Roxana — and you really can't blame him much, considering that she was the pick of a section of country about the size of France. He talked to her a good deal, but that was n't surprising, as she is far the most intelligent of the lot. Then one day she sang some weird little melancholy songs to the accompaniment of the harp, and — Oh, what was the use? He's crazy about her. The day before we left, he told me that he was coming on to marry her. He takes your consent for granted."

"Gee!—" Ruggles reached for his handkerchief.

"Well, then," Miss Elliot continued, with some of her habitual briskness, "the next victim was Rosa —"

"Rosa — that baby? Oh, say —?"

"That baby can walk and talk," said Miss Elliot dryly. "That baby drugged Hassan and climbed down a wistaria vine with the assistance of a handsome young Italian who lives with his invalid mother in one of those villas on the edge of the Bosphorus just below the palace. Fortunately I happened to be rather sleepless that night and heard the vine rustle and went out with Sarah to investigate. We caught them in each other's arms on the stone bench where you sat and waited that day. In spite of his indiscreet behavior, he seemed to be a nice boy, and after Sarah had marched Rosa back to bed I had a little talk with him. The upshot of it was he told me his name and how it all came about. The girls were on the landing one day, waiting for the launch. Hassan left them for a moment to get something which had been forgotten and Selim was in the boathouse. This boy, whose name is Humberto, is the Conte del Castelfranco, and belongs to one of the best and oldest families in Italy—"

"Gee! He acts up to it, all right," panted Ruggles.

"Well, he happened to paddle by in his canoe while the girls were waiting there and he saw Rosa and promptly fell in love with her. He knew who they were, and after that he climbed the wall several times and managed to slip up and throw notes into their windows. It's my private opinion that he bribed Hassan, but I could n't swear to it."

"That Hassan person never looked right to me," Ruggles said.

"Humberto," Miss Elliot continued, "assured me on his word of honor as a gentleman that this was the first time that he and Rosa had ever met, but that he was wildly in love with her and wanted to marry her. I told him that in that case he had better let me talk to his mother, and he said that he wished I would. So the next day I went there and called. The old lady was pretty cattish at first, but when she learned more about the girl, and particularly that she had a dot of a million francs, she warmed up considerably. The next day I invited her and Humberto to tea, and well — to make a long story shorter, they are both coming on to Paris in a couple of weeks to ask your consent to the marriage."

"Gee! " muttered Ruggles, between his teeth. "Would n't that jar you, though?" He mopped his moist forehead. "Well, how about Bulbul and Alessandra? I suppose King Ferdinand and King Constantine came flyin' over in aeroplanes to get them."

"They did n't have time," replied Miss Elliot. "Bulbul has been commandeered by an American soldier of fortune who is a West Point graduate and came out here as a war correspondent. His paper has recalled him, but he has decided to remain on in Constantinople to write a history of the war. He says that it may take him twenty years, if things

keep on as they are now going, but that he is in no hurry whatever, and that with Bulbul he would not mind remaining fifty. Pembroke brought him over for tea one day, and as he had been having chills and fever he decided to come back with us on the ship to Marseilles to get the malaria out of his system. He appears to have succeeded with the fever, but he has got something else in his system in its place, and he is now in Paris and means to come around to see if you may not be good enough to help him get it out. Bulbul is mad about him, and as she is dark and plump and beautiful and he is built like a giraffe and just about as handsome, they ought to be splendidly suited to each other."

"Gee!" gasped Ruggles helplessly; "it's not Mr. Livingstone, is it?"

"Right the first time," snapped Miss Elliot. "It is Gallatin Livingstone — or 'Galloping' Livingstone, as he tells me they used to call him at West Point. Lord Pembroke assures me that he is very well connected, a thoroughly nice fellow, and usually pays his debts. They knew each other in the Philippines, where he was corresponding or fighting or both, and Pembroke was fishing for pearls at a place called Jolo."

"I know him," muttered Ruggles, sliding deeper into his chair. "Well, now let's have Alessandra — and then I'll go up and sort of rest for a little while."

"Alessandra," said Miss Elliot, "has succumbed utterly to the fascinations of a very distinguished-

looking French naval officer, the Marquis Raoul de Poligny de Pouilly-en-Auxois —"

"Gee! How did you remember all that —"

" — who has been retired with the rank of first lieutenant owing to an injury received in the explosion of the Patrie, which has resulted in a defect of his hearing. Raoul is no longer in the first flush of youth; about forty, I should say, but seems to be a very splendid man. The captain of our ship introduced him. He fell in love with Roxana, first, but on learning that she was practically engaged, he tacked ship and ran alongside Bulbul — because she happened to be the nearest, perhaps. But that brought Livingstone galloping down the deck, and he looked so ferocious that Raoul seemed to think one of the other two chances might be better worth while. Rosa was apparently quite willing to lead him on, as there was no prospect of her seeing her Humberto for about a month, but I squelched that, and he brought his starboard batteries to bear on Alessandra, his port ones being out of action as the result of the explosion. She fell madly in love with him on the spot, particularly as the three other girls were already bespoken, and now she can talk of nothing else. Indeed, she might go farther and fare worse, because he is a very kind, simple-hearted man and extremely intelligent. He and Livingstone got very thick, and Gallatin told me that Raoul had asked him to stand his friend in the business. You see, Raoul's got only his pay and

he's getting on a bit. But I must say he seems crazy about Alessandra, and I'm sure he'd make her a kind and devoted husband. The two of them came up with us on the train from Marseilles and they are going to call on you as soon as you can see them. I've explained that the girls could not marry without your consent and that you were going to be very particular in choosing their husbands."

She began to laugh again, dropping her face in her hands with her characteristic manner. Ruggles did not laugh. On the contrary, he leaned back in his chair gripping its ample arms rather tightly in either hand, while a frown, or rather a deep groove which betokened an intensity of thought, drew itself straight up between his eyebrows. His face, still pale from occasional periods of physical pain which came from time to time when overtired, was rather drawn and the shadows under his eyes darker than usual.

Miss Elliot looked up, still laughing. At sight of Ruggles's expression her mirth died a sudden and violent death.

"What is it?" she asked quickly. "Are you ill?"

"Oh, no," Ruggles answered; "I'm just thinking of what you've just told me."

"Then why do you look like that? Are you angry?"

"Not at all. I don't see anything to be angry about."

"Then what is it?" The color poured into her

face. "I thought you'd be awfully glad. Why, just think, Mr. Ruggles; here you had these girls on your hands to marry off as best you could, and now it looks as if it were practically done and you had nothing more to bother about."

"I don't quite see it that way," Ruggles answered slowly. "I never counted on carryin' out Hamid Pasha's directions in quite this way. My bother does n't matter. Besides, I guess I 'm well paid for it. Now, look here, Miss Elliot," — he dropped his elbow on the arm of the chair, rested his chin in his hands, and his clear, blue eyes looked steadily into her gray ones, just now filled with a hurt, resentful look, — "let 's go over this thing carefully, just like it was any other business proposition that needed some studying out. Take Rosa, now, — we'll leave Roxana for the last — How about this young Italian? Has he got any money of his own?"

"I don't really believe that he has," Miss Elliot answered, "but his mother must have a little, as they seemed to be living quite comfortably."

"But all the same, she jumped at the chance of getting him married to Rosa when she heard of Rosa's dot, did n't she?"

"She seemed willing," Miss Elliot admitted. "But he's got a good title."

"It was n't too good, though, to give to a little girl out of a harem that had just climbed down a wistaria vine to meet him in the garden, was it? I

guess it would n't fetch much on the market — do you think so?"

Miss Elliot bit her lip and did not answer.

"Now this Livingstone," Ruggles went on. "Who 's going to put up for him for the twenty years that he 's writing his history of Turkey? Has he got any money outside of what he makes?"

Miss Elliot looked rather disturbed. "I don't believe he has, from what Lord Pembroke said," she faltered, "but he 's a very brilliant writer and earns a good salary."

"As long as he 's on the job," said Ruggles. "But from what you say about his being recalled, it looks like he was out of a job, just now, does n't it? And he does n't seem to care about breaking his neck hunting for another."

"But he 's of very good family and a West Pointer — an ex-officer in the United States Army," Miss Elliot protested.

"So far as I can see," Ruggles observed, "his family don't seem to be good for his meal tickets. And as for his being a one-time army officer, why did he get out?"

"I 'm sure I don't know, Mr. Ruggles," said Miss Elliot, with a tone that tried to be injured but somehow failed of its effect. "No doubt he preferred to write for his living."

"And now he seems to prefer to quit writing and get married for his living. Well, never mind him. Next, here 's this French officer. No doubt he 's a

very fine man, but he's over forty and half deaf, and has nothing but his retired pay, and that in the French army or navy is about enough to pay his laundry bill. He's got a title all right, but you can't eat titles. Now just stop and look at this bunch, Miss Elliot? What sort of a man would I be to hand out Hamid Pasha's daughters to three such bums, just to save myself a little more bother, and after what he's done for me?"

Miss Elliot's eyes fell. She looked, in fact, very much abashed, which was a most unusual expression for Miss Elliot.

"No doubt you're right, Mr. Ruggles," she murmured. "I — I had n't looked at it in just this way. They all seemed so nice — and attractive and desirable —"

Ruggles pondered for a moment longer. Miss Elliot remained discreetly silent. Anger and resentment had all oozed out of her. She felt extremely foolish. Here she had come bouncing into this stately mansion which Ruggles had prepared with such care for his wards and herself and jubilantly informed him that there was no need of it; that all was arranged, his responsibility relieved, the desired behest of Hamid Pasha in a way to be soon discharged — Miss Elliot wished that a trapdoor would open under her feet and drop her into an oubliette. She thought of her semi-hysterical mirth at Ruggles's dazed expression as he had listened to her and her cheeks burned.

And here opposite her was Ruggles, whom from the first she had been disposed to patronize and direct. She had regarded him as a rather ordinary but agreeable boy of no particular traits, who, by a stroke of marvelous luck and the senile whim of an old man, had fallen into fortune like a pup into a fountain. True, he had once dominated her, but that she had felt since to have been an accident. She had not intended to yield again.

But now, as she met Ruggles's quiet, pleasant gaze, her woman's intuition told her suddenly that in all crucial questions with the forceful personality opposite she was destined invariably to yield. He would compel her obedience on every point; either that or her demission. He would have his way.

Miss Elliot realized this with a sudden warm glow, the source of which she would have found impossible to analyze, but which was very far from being unpleasant. She remembered that she had felt it that day at the palace when Ruggles had had his way with her. Her eyes rested upon him with a new respect and a peculiar submission. But she felt that she had still one claim to his commendation.

"But how about Lord Pembroke?" she asked, almost timidly. "Surely you have nothing to object to in him?"

Ruggles rose from his chair with a slight effort and stood for a moment leaning on his stick and placing a gradually increasing weight upon his injured ankle.

"No," he answered slowly. "I guess nobody could find anything much the matter with Pembroke. But say, Miss Elliot, s'pose you had a friend who had done more for you than any person alive — and s'pose one day he went crazy with the heat and took it into his head that he was a lion-tamer and wanted to get into a cage with a lioness. Would you let him, if you were husky enough to hold him back? Of course you would n't. And when he got his senses back, he'd be mighty glad that you had n't. Well, I'm not so sure that I *am* husky enough — but I'll certainly do my darnedest to hold Pembroke!"

CHAPTER XIX

Miss Agnes Elliot took her lesson very much to heart, but being an intelligent and fair-minded young woman, she fully appreciated its worth and determined to profit by it. For many days she grew hot with shame whenever she thought of how she had sat and giggled over what she had considered a very quick and clever series of matchmakings, and then how Ruggles had quietly torn up the whole prospectus and thrown it into the waste-paper basket.

With some inward mortification, which, however, she managed to conceal, she told the four girls that Ruggles Effendi had seen fit to veto their prospective alliances, being determined to find them richer and more distinguished husbands. Much to her surprise, they took this information with the quiet submission of the Oriental women, trained from infancy to obedience. In fact, their coolness was a bit of a shock to Miss Elliot. Roxana was the only one to venture any direct expression of her sentiments. She raised her splendid shoulders slightly, smiled a little to herself, and said: "I am glad."

The Marquis Raoul de Poligny de Pouilly-en-Auxois and "Galloping" Livingstone called upon

Ruggles within a day or two. Ruggles felt sorry for the Marquis, a courteous and, as Miss Elliot had said, distinguished man and a chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur. He explained to Ruggles quite frankly that practically all he had to offer was a good name, an honorable career, and the assurance of affectionate marital devotion. When Ruggles explained with equal frankness that as the executor of a sacred trust imposed upon him by his benefactor he did not feel justified in bestowing the hand of his ward, with her dot of a million francs, upon one who, all questions of family and personal worth aside, was unable to match her fortune with something approaching it, the Marquis replied that such a point of view was quite reasonable and customary, and they parted with mutual expressions of esteem.

Mr. Livingstone was not so easily disposed of. He tried first to impress Ruggles with his splendid family connections, good prospects ("When this old uncle of mine cashes in — head of one of the strongest banking houses in America"), his recognized abilities as a writer, and the fact of his being an ex-lieutenant of the United States Army. Finding this preliminary skirmish a waste of ammunition, the more so as it failed even so much as to draw the fire of the enemy and locate his position (for Ruggles merely listened to the detonations from his masked trench without so much as shooting a question in reply), Mr. Livingstone tried argu-

ment. Was n't it better for the girl to marry an American gentleman than some scrub of a titled foreigner who would eat up or drink up or do-something-else-worse-up with her fortune and throw her over when he'd got all he wanted of her? Ruggles agreed with him. Well, then, why not — etc., etc. Ruggles waited until he had got rather tired of talking for so long a time without liquid refreshment, then asked him if he had ever been in any sort of business. Livingstone said that he had not, in the strictly commercial sense. Ruggles then pointed out that he himself was a business man and had formed the habit of looking at things from a business point of view. In this particular case he was the trustee of a million francs to be put into a marriage partnership. If Livingstone could raise an equal sum, why then he might come around and talk business. Otherwise there was "nothing doing." Livingstone, world-bitten adventurer and soldier of fortune, took a good look at Ruggles's pale, set face, and being a keen judge of men, decided that there was no use in a further waste of powder. They parted pleasantly enough.

Miss Challand and Darthea took up their abode in Ruggles's household a few days after the arrival of Miss Elliot and the young ladies, and, to Ruggles's immense relief, appeared to be charmed with the girls, Miss Elliot, and the establishment in general; which latter, thanks to the high efficiency of the trained Levantine servants, was soon settled

down to its steady beat with the noiseless rhythm of a finely adjusted machine.

Mr. Falconer called with the Turkish Ambassador, whose chief Hamid Pasha had once been. Then came invitations to informal teas at the house of the Turkish Ambassador and at Mr. Falconer's apartment, where acquaintanceships were formed with certain ladies of the diplomatic set. Other invitations followed, these functions being of a quiet and formally informal character; for although, following the Mohammedan custom, conventional mourning was not being observed, it was necessary to conform to a certain extent to surrounding conditions.

Miss Challand then issued some invitations for tea — and there were no regrets. On the contrary, several of her *invitées* asked permission to bring friends. On one of these occasions, Roxana was asked to sing — which was to her the equivalent of being ordered to sing — to the accompaniment of her harp. This triumph of the Trans-Caucasus drifted from her chair like a wreath of seaweed caught in an eddy, and stood for a moment smiling and swaying, while her eyes peered beneath their long lashes until they caught those of Richard Ruggles, late salesman of the Walkeasy Shoe Company, who happened to be sitting next the wife of the Argentine Ambassador.

"Do you wish me to sing, Ruggles Effendi?" she asked.

"Sure," answered Ruggles. "Sing one of those Persian songs."

So Roxana sang.

Ruggles, once he had got this business well going and its several departments in competent hands, gradually withdrew from any active direction. Not only that, but he withdrew from personal participation. Learning from Miss Challand that his presence was not required by the rules of social conduct, he seldom appeared at the quiet functions, which, like a well-formed snowball rolled about a lawn, were gradually increasing by a sort of geometrical progression. Ruggles, in fact, was a sufficiently busy person. He was beginning to discover that the life of a millionaire at the head of a large and expensive household was not the primrose path which he had formerly thought it. In fact, so far as actual work was concerned, Ruggles usually got through more in the twenty-four hours than the average clerk.

Then one day he received a letter from Pembroke, saying that he had seen Mr. Karapopoulopoulous, who was having the greatest difficulty in preventing the confiscation, by the Imperial Ottoman Treasury, of the late Hamid Pasha's palace and the many valuable things that it contained; and that if Ruggles wished to make a fight for it, he would advise his coming out to Constantinople to defend the litigation. Ruggles's business in-

stincts rebelling against the idea of letting property that was his by moral and testamentary right be taken from him without a protest, he decided to act upon this advice, the more so as his presence in Paris seemed no longer absolutely necessary. Therefore, he turned over the business management of his household to a trustworthy *homme d'affaires* recommended by his Paris lawyers and proceeded at once to Constantinople.

Pembroke met him upon his arrival and took him to his quarters, where they had a long talk, Ruggles describing how he had established his wards and the social attentions that they were already receiving. He spoke also of the early suitors and of the manner in which he had disposed of their demands.

"I wrote to this Conte del Castelfranco," he concluded, "and told him straight that there was no use in his asking for Rosa unless he could furnish proof that he had a million francs to his own credit. He had n't answered the letter when I left."

Pembroke smiled. "Humberto has n't a sou, poor little devil," said he. "I know them slightly, and I 've heard they live on a small allowance that the old girl has from her brother-in-law, who manufactures Roman silks, or something of the sort."

"Those high-soundin' titles just hypnotized Miss Elliot," Ruggles remarked, "and Livingstone got in his fine work by turning on the hot air. He sure had plenty of it."

Pembroke frowned. "I'm afraid that Livingstone was my fault," said he. "I'd known him a long time and always found him a good enough sort, so I took him over with me for tea one day. If I'd ever thought that he was going to have a try, I should never have done so."

Pembroke sat for a moment puffing at his pipe, then looked at Ruggles with a swarthy flush under his fresh but weather-beaten skin.

"I suppose Miss Elliot told you that I want to marry Roxana," he said, a little stiffly.

"Yes," Ruggles answered, "she told me about that."

"Hope you've no objections to offer," said Pembroke. "I can manage the million francs." He gave a short laugh.

Ruggles did not immediately answer. Pembroke glanced at him and his lids narrowed. The color deepened in his clean-cut face.

"'Pon my word, you don't look any too pleased about it, old chap, I must say!" He took his pipe from his mouth and stared at Ruggles curiously. Then, noting the gathering flush on Ruggles's lean cheeks, his handsome face clouded. "Good Lord, you have n't gone and fallen in love with her yourself, have you?"

"What, me? No, of course not. I ain't in love with her."

"Then has anybody else?" Pembroke leaned forward, gripping the arms of his chair, and the

veins on his temples darkened. "Some other Johnny trying to cut me out?"

Ruggles shook his head. "No," he answered heavily, "it ain't that, either."

"Then what the devil is it? What are you looking so glum about? Mind you, though, I'm not precisely asking your permission, my dear fellow. I'd marry her anyhow, and let the dot slide."

Ruggles leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtfully at Pembroke's hot face.

"Say, Lord Pembroke," said he, "did you ever have any pig-keepers in your family?"

Pembroke's strong jaw fell.

"Why — upon my soul — are you mad, Ruggles?"

"No — and you need n't get mad either. There 's no harm meant. I 'm just asking for information."

"Pig-keepers — what the deuce do you mean? Swineherds?"

"Yes. Swineherds. You have n't, have you?"

"Look here, Ruggles," — Pembroke's jaw hardened and his eyes began to gleam ominously, — "I don't mind a little chaff now and again, but if you think that just because you've come into a pile of money —"

"Hold on a minute." Ruggles raised his hand. "Just try to keep your temper and you'll see in a minute what I 'm trying to get at. There 's another question I want to ask you. Now I've heard you speak of your mother, and I know you think a

heap of her. How would you like it if people were to point at her and say: 'See that woman? Well, her father tended hogs out in the beech woods, and so did her brothers and sisters. She might have been doing that now, herself, but she was mighty good-looking, and her folks thought that they might get more out of her some other way, so they sold her — '"

He got no further. Pembroke had bounded from his chair, his face crimson, and his powerful grip fell on Ruggles's throat. But even as his grasp tightened, he began vaguely to understand. The tense fingers relaxed. He thrust Ruggles from him and sank back into his seat. The color faded from his cheeks.

"You damned little cad!" he growled. "You little shoe-shop bounder that I picked out of the gutter!"

"That's right," Ruggles answered, with a little choke. "That's what I was. And you're Lord Pembroke. And if you do what you say you want to do and marry Roxana, then people can say about your children's mother what you were ready to choke me for just sort of asking how you'd feel if they was to say it about yours. See? Only in the case of your children it would be true. The grandfather of the next Lord Pembroke would be a dirty swineherd somewhere over there across the Black Sea." And he jerked his head toward the east.

Pembroke's face was set and rigid. He swallowed

once or twice, but did not try to speak. Ruggles went on as quietly as though he had not just narrowly escaped a strangling: —

"Say, Lord Pembroke, you know just as well as I do, that people as high up in society as you are can't always do what they like. It would n't be a square deal — not only to those of their family that are living, but to those that might come after them. I never looked at it that way until I met you and Mr. Falconer and Hamid Pasha and some others that were the real thing. But there 's no getting around it, I guess. And then there 's another thing — this girl Roxana 's only about half-civilized. I 've watched her and I know. For all of her wonderful looks, she 's a regular she-devil inside, and it only needs a jolt to bring it out. What sort of a wife would she be for you? Believe me, I 'd rather marry a lioness and live in the cage with her. There 's something in her eyes that scares me, sometimes — and you know yourself that I don't scare so awful easy."

Pembroke, who had been watching him fixedly, leaned forward and buried his face in his hands.

"God!" he muttered. "You 've struck it, Ruggles. It 's just that has driven me nearly mad. She 's a great, splendid, tawny lioness — but damn it, man, she 's more than that! She 's got mind. She 's got a soul. I know her better than you think. I 've talked to her. I 've studied her. There 's a lot of the savage underneath, I 'll admit, but who

wants one of these puling 'born-in-captivity' women? I can tame her. I'm none so civilized myself, and I've always told myself that if ever I came to mate, it would be with some such woman as that." He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his glistening forehead. "There have been no end of sultans whose mothers were taken from the same class," he growled. "Hamid Pasha himself was very probably the son of a slave. All the Turks take their wives in that way."

"Yes," Ruggles answered quietly, "and look at them now."

Pembroke's jaw set stubbornly, and when he spoke, there was something in his voice that struck a chill through Ruggles.

"Oh, well," said he harshly. "No doubt you're right. I'll chuck my title, change my name, marry the girl, and clear out for America or Africa or some other place. 'Nuff said. I've got to have her, and that's jolly well all there is about it."

Nobody, to hear and see the man, could have doubted the finality of this decision. Ruggles's face turned very pale, and his expression was for the moment almost fierce.

"You'd really do that?" he asked.

"Right," said Pembroke, almost indifferently. "More than that, I'm going to do it. I tell you, Ruggles, I've got to have her, and that's all there is about it."

Ruggles leaned forward quickly in his chair.

"Then take her," said he. "You can have her. I'll give her to you. There's nothing to hinder. Take her and do anything you like with her — only, for the love of God, *don't marry her!*"

Pembroke started forward, staring at Ruggles in amazement and disbelief.

"What?" he cried. "Are you mad? When Hamid Pasha —"

"Don't you talk Hamid Pasha to me!" cried Ruggles roughly. "Did n't I save his life and get all shot up doing it? Will I ever be a sound man again? Did I promise anything about these girls? I guess the score 's about square between Hamid Pasha and Richard Ruggles." He leaned farther forward and deep lines drew themselves obliquely across either cheek. "But the score ain't settled between you and me, Lord Pembroke. What you said was true. You picked me out of the gutter and brought me out here with you and made a man of me. When I was shot to pieces, you stuck by me day and night — and gave me your own clean water when I was thirsty, and risked cholera drinking out of a stinking ditch. And afterwards — Oh, say, what 's the use? Do you think I'm going to see you throw your life away after all that? Not by a damned sight! I'd give you the whole bunch, first — I — I —"

His voice broke. He burst into tears, turned in his chair, folded his arms against its back, and

buried his face in them. Sobs shook his body as though to rack it apart.

Then a strong, comforting hand dropped upon his heaving shoulder with all of the old gentleness and magnetic touch. A low, vibrant voice, tremulous itself, said soothingly:—

"There — there — my boy — there — there! I'm sorry."

CHAPTER XX

THE litigation (a polite phrase for anything pertaining to equity in the Ottoman Empire) over the estate of Hamid Pasha was tiresome in the extreme, the object being apparently so to delay anything approaching a decision as to wear out the patience of the foreign claimant and thus to save for the Empire the ten per cent of the whole which Ruggles might otherwise have expected eventually to receive.

In this the wily Turk met with the success which usually has attended his policy of procrastination. Ruggles, after several interviews with high officials, one being no less a person than the Grand Vizier himself, and appearing several times before a tribunal for the investigation of his claims as an heir, was politely informed that the case would be tried according to the regular procedure of the Ottoman law and that every justice would be rendered him. After that nothing happened.

Pembroke returned to England when Ruggles had been about three weeks at the Porte, and the latter was rather relieved to have him go, as the surgeon had grown moody and taciturn and inclined to avoid all social intercourse. His attitude toward Ruggles was similar to that of a would-be suicide who harbors resentment against the friend

who has thwarted him. It was understood between the two that Pembroke was not to see Roxana again.

At the end of six weeks, thoroughly disgusted with Ottoman "law" and its methods, Ruggles consigned the whole business to Mr. K., etc., and returned to Paris. The summer had been a vile one in western Europe and many people had preferred to remain in Paris to soaking and freezing alternately at the beaches and other resorts, so that with the usual influx of foreign visitors the city had rather its winter than its summer aspect.

His household greeted him warmly, and from Miss Challand (for Miss Elliot had tacitly resigned her office of matchmaker in favor of this lady) he received the gratifying news that a matrimonial alliance had been proposed by a certain Madame de Montereau on the part of her two sons, Marcel and Bertrand, aged respectively twenty-seven and twenty-four, whom she desired to wed to Bulbul and Alessandra. These young gentlemen, though not titled, were of a good family of prosperous manufacturers. On the death of their father, they might expect to inherit the business and a considerable fortune.

Also, the hand of Roxana had been sought in marriage by the young Baron von Hertzfeld, son of the retired banker of that name, originally of St. Petersburg. The Von Hertzfelds were orthodox Jews, enormously rich and highly respected.

Yakub, Roxana's suitor, was thirty years of age and a man of great charm and intelligence. He had been presented by an attaché of the British Embassy.

"Of course," said Miss Challand, "she would have to embrace his religion. Do you think Hamid Pasha would have objected?"

"No," Ruggles answered. "All that Hamid Pasha objected to was an all-round infidel. What does Roxana think about it?"

"Nothing has been said to Roxana," Miss Challand answered. "She is a very odd girl, Mr. Ruggles. If it were n't for the clever things she sometimes says, one might almost think her dull. The others are tremendously interested in their new lives, and as merry as schoolgirls on a lark. But Roxana goes sometimes the whole day without speaking a word. Yet she seems happy, and is always extremely agreeable. She must see that Baron von Hertzfeld admires her tremendously, and she is always very nice to him, but then she is nice to everybody. It is a constant source of wonder to me to see how quickly these girls have adapted themselves to our customs. One would think that they were convent-bred."

"I guess Hamid Pasha had something of this sort planned for them for a long time," Ruggles answered, "and sort of trained them for it. Now, about Roxana. Maybe I'd better sound her a little on the subject of Von Hertzfeld. I'll try to

get a chance to speak to her alone, to-night after dinner. Of course, if she does n't want him, she does n't have to have him."

"What do you think of it yourself?" Miss Challand asked.

"Oh, I don't see anything against it. I've known lots of Jews that were mighty fine men. When I was working in the store the best friend I had was a Jew named Simon. He left there to study art. I'm going to look him up as soon as I get time and see how he 's making out."

The household dined together, Ruggles presiding at one end of the table and Miss Challand at the other, between them such a galaxy of beauty as one might travel far and fail to find. Ruggles enjoyed these repasts, for odd as the assortment was they represented the first home atmosphere that he had ever known. The conversation at table was general and vivacious, Alessandra and Bulbul being the chatterboxes of the party, and Ruggles derived much entertainment from their childlike comments on people and things. When he himself spoke, the girls became quiet.

Roxana seldom volunteered a remark, although at first she had asked a good many questions, usually of Miss Challand, for whom she seemed to have formed an affection. Her manner to Miss Elliot was formally polite and to Darthea friendly and admiring. A musical artiste herself, Roxana appreciated Darthea's skill with her brush, and

nothing pleased her more than to be asked to the studio to sit and watch Darthea at her work. This did not often happen, as Darthea did not like to have her attention distracted when at her easel.

The evenings were usually spent in music and bridge, of which game Miss Challand was inordinately fond and which the girls had acquired as young ducks learn to swim. Roxana alone took no interest in cards, preferring to amuse herself at the piano or harp while the others were at the bridge table. She liked, also, when the weather permitted, to throw a scarf about her tawny head and walk about the gardens alone. It was Miss Elliot's opinion that the girl was secretly homesick and pining for the soft airs which wafted down the Bosphorus, so she never interfered with these evening promenades.

Ruggles appeared to have brought back the fair weather from the south, for the day of his arrival in Paris was one of those bright but softly colored ones for which France is famed and which, alas, are now becoming rare. The sky had been a drowsy, hazy blue and a soft breeze whispered through the high foliage of the ancient elms and acacias. After dinner the air cleared and the stars shone down from a lofty dome of deepest indigo and the air was sweet in the garden with the flowering syringa. As they left the dining-room, Roxana lingered.

"I am going out in the garden," she said to Miss Elliot. "I wish to take the air."

"Very well, my dear," Miss Elliot answered, and glanced at Ruggles. "Would you like to play bridge after we have our coffee, Mr. Ruggles?" she asked.

"I don't know how to play," Ruggles answered. "I'll have to get you to teach me some day. I guess I'll go out and walk around a little with Roxana, if she don't mind."

Roxana's long lashes swept up suddenly, then down again.

"I shall be mos' happy," she murmured.

Miss Elliot turned away, and Ruggles led Roxana through the conservatory and out into the perfumed darkness. His stick slipped on the marble step, and instantly Roxana's hand closed on his arm with an amazing strength.

"Be careful, Ruggles Effendi," said her sweet voice in his ear. And Ruggles, while wondering at her strength, for she had saved him from a nasty fall, was at the same time conscious of a faint, exquisite odor, spicy and elusive, suggesting cinnamon and stephanotis, and which seemed to come from her hair.

They followed a little path and came presently to a wicker bench under a flowering catalpa, of which the snowy blossoms shone white against the dark, lustrous foliage.

"Let's sit down here," said Ruggles. "I want to talk to you, Roxana."

"I am listening, Ruggles Effendi."

She seated herself beside him, and Ruggles felt her breath on his cheek as she swayed toward him to look into his face, as though trying to read its expression in the gloom. Again he was conscious of the sweet, faint perfume. He leaned forward, resting his clasped hands upon the head of his cane.

"Do you like it here in Paris, Roxana?" he asked.

"Yes — now that you have come."

"Oh, what difference does that make?" Ruggles asked, a little awkwardly. "You like it anyway, don't you?"

"I would not like it without you," she answered, "because I love you. Can't you feel me loving you, beloved?" Her voice was like the first sweet, low, tentative note of a nightingale before its song; a prelude and a promise of the liquid notes to follow.

Ruggles could scarcely believe that he had heard aright; he was bewildered and confused. What did the girl mean? Then it flashed through his head that this childlike declaration was not to be taken in its literal sense, but merely as an expression of sympathy and liking. It would be outrageous to suppose that Roxana had fallen in love with him, or that, even if she thought she had, she would state the fact with such simple candor.

For Roxana's Oriental viewpoint of their relative positions was impossible to Ruggles. It was inconceivable to his Western mind. He saw himself as her guardian and protector and saddled with the responsibility of her future welfare, him-

self but a humble person from the middle class, essentially practical and possessed of some executive ability, but as far removed from Romance as a shoehorn. There is a certain type of person which, while gifted with imagery and capable of sentimental daydreams, cannot apply personally the realization of such dreams. Such people knock repeatedly at the door of Romance, and then, when Romance comes, she comes in sober black with an umbrella and galoshes to enter their lives under the name of Smith or Brown.

Had Ruggles in his ramblings awheel possessed the imagination to have conceived such events as had happened him during the last few months, the romance of the fantasy would have dazzled him. But because they had actually occurred, poor Romance got no credit for them. The God of Things as They Are has scant time to waste on his impractical though charming brother, the God of Things as They Might Be.

Oddly enough Roxana's point of view was merely the Oriental adaptation of Ruggles's, and as such quite reasonable. She had belonged to Hamid Pasha, who had been as a father to her and had loved her for her beauty and attainments, which affection she rendered in kind. But now Hamid Pasha had been taken to the bosom of the Prophet and Ruggles was his heir. Ruggles had inherited her, Roxana, with other of Hamid Pasha's real and personal property. Therefore she was his, and why in

the name of all that was reasonable should he not enjoy her, just as he enjoyed the other benefits? The Occidental precepts of Miss Elliot and Miss Challand and Mr. Falconer and others had slipped from Roxana as rain from the back of a duck, not one drop soaking in. Theory was all right in its way, but facts were facts. She belonged to Ruggles and was glad of it, because he was beautiful and brave and kindly and generous — and young.

In her heart Roxana had been sorely perplexed at Ruggles's behavior toward herself. She understood quite thoroughly her worth and her desirability and had no difficulty in translating the thoughts that were written in men's eyes as they met hers. She knew that her beauty was phenomenal, her voice a nightingale's, her mind vivid and alert; not like that of many women she had known in different harems — sordid, selfish, sensual, and cruel. She was a mountain girl and loved more the rush of free air and the tang of frost and the free use of her muscles and clear, cold water in which to bathe than sweetmeats and jewels and massage and heavy, exotic, stifling things. She was a maiden destined for the Yildiz Kiosk (the Sultan's harem) when given to Hamid Pasha by Abdul Hamid, and therefore her apple of knowledge still hung from the bough. She had never desired to taste thereof until Ruggles Effendi, late of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America, had braved the wrath of Miss Elliot, that incomprehensible woman, and

walked into the *haremlik* of the departed Hamid Pasha.

It all seemed very simple to Roxana while at the same time infuriatingly perplexing. Since she had been in Paris and had been permitted, not only to go about unveiled, but to meet and talk to different men, she had come to realize her power. These men desired her greatly, yet seemed always afraid of her. They encroached, but half-heartedly, upon her maiden reserve. Notes had been slipped into her hand by the maître d'hôtel or chasseur, not only on leaving such establishments as the Ritz and Carlton, but even in walking on the Avenue du Bois with Miss Elliot and the other girls. Roxana read their impassioned contents and threw them away. Alessandra, Bulbul, and even that adolescent beauty, Rosa, would have kept them, read them over and over, dreamed of sentimental possibilities, shown them to the other girls, and possibly have bribed the little ladies' maid to have engineered a *poste restante* at the corner of the garden wall. Roxana consigned them to the famous sewage system of Paris, where no doubt they floated on their proper level. Some of them may have sunk.

Ruggles decided that the best method of procedure would be to come to a clear, mutual understanding. Roxana had just said that she loved — literally translated, liked — him. Ruggles took his point of departure from this reckoning. But before

expressing himself, he decided that he had better put Roxana right on certain figures of speech, which might afterwards lead to misunderstandings.

"I'm mighty glad you think so much of me, Roxana," he said. "But you know there's a lot of difference between liking a person and loving him. And there are a good many different kinds of love."

Roxana's eyes glowed darkly from her pale face.

"I have them all for you, Ruggles Effendi," she said softly. "Why do you not love me, too? How happy we could be!" She sighed.

Ruggles felt the blood pouring into his face. "I guess you don't quite realize what you're saying, Roxana," he said.

"But indeed I do," she answered quickly. "Why should I not love you? And why should you not love me? Do you know any girl more beautiful than I? Do I not please you? I can sing for you and play for you and dance for you. I know the Circassian gesture dance and many others. And where could you find a girl with such hair as mine and such a skin and a body that is neither fat nor thin, and —"

"Roxana," Ruggles interrupted, "you must n't say things like that."

"Why not, effendi?" she whispered softly. "Are they not true? And am I not yours? Did not Hamid Pasha give me to you? What may I not say to you, Ruggles Effendi? For your eyes, there is no veil across my face or across my heart."

Ruggles leaned back in his chair, breathing rapidly. There was a sweetness and a seduction in Roxana's voice such as he had never heard in any other, while the childish simplicity of her wooing cleared it of all immodesty. She spoke from no heat of passion, but plaintively, like a child hurt at having withheld from it something which it feels to be its due. The ravishing Roxana was begging for love as a little girl might beg for promised sweets.

Ruggles could find no words with which to answer her. And the sweetness of her as she leaned toward him entreating his favor was that of orange blossoms drenched in dew. Not one man in a hundred could have kept his head in the face of such an appeal from such a source. Some girls are fashioned for work and some for play and some to pass the time away; there are the true and the false, the motherly and the wanton-hearted, the artists and the earthy. Roxana was fashioned for love; her mission in life, for which she had been trained from childhood, was to please. Art and nature had combined to fit her for this faculty. And now, when she wished the most to fulfill this function, both failed her. Roxana was hurt and puzzled.

"What is it, Ruggles Effendi?" she asked. "Have I done anything to displease you?"

"Of course not," Ruggles answered. "But, you see, it's like this, Roxana. Before Hamid Pasha died —"

He was interrupted by a light step on the gravel path, and a white-clad figure appeared. Then a voice that both recognized as Miss Elliot's called:

"Mr. Ruggles —"

"Here I am," Ruggles answered.

Miss Elliot drew nearer and stood for a moment looking at them as they sat close together on the wicker bench. It was too dark to see her face, but when she spoke, her voice held a peculiar cold note.

"Baron von Hertzfeld has called," said she. "I thought you might like to meet him."

"All right," Ruggles answered. "We'll be in directly."

Miss Elliot turned and went back to the house. Ruggles looked at Roxana.

"What I was going to say is this: Hamid Pasha left me a letter, when he died, asking me to look after you four girls and see that you got started right in life and married in the European way. He sort of felt that Turkey was breaking up, I guess, and he did n't want you left without somebody to take care of you. He said in his letter that I was to consider myself just like your big brother, and that's exactly how I feel about you. If I was an outsider, it might be different, but, you see, Roxana, I'd have to be a pretty poor sort of a man to go contrary to his directions, after all he's done for me."

Roxana nodded her lovely head. "I see, Ruggles Effendi," she answered sadly.

"So you must n't think about me that way," Ruggles went on. "I want to see you girls happily married to good husbands. Now, Bulbul and Alessandra will probably marry these two Montereau brothers. This Baron von Hertzfeld wants to marry you. What do you think about it, Roxana?"

The girl began to toy with the gravel with the tip of her little slipper.

"He is very nice," she answered in a low voice, "and very handsome. He is a Jew, but I have heard that the Jews are very kind to their wives and give them a great many presents. Besides, he is very rich. I will marry him if you wish me to, Ruggles Effendi."

"Now that 's real sensible," Ruggles answered, greatly relieved. It flashed across his mind that perhaps he had been unjust to Roxana. Why, this girl whom he had regarded as a lioness was after all as docile as a kitten. "But before you marry him, you'd better find out if you really care for him," said he.

Roxana slightly raised her splendid shoulders.

"It does not matter," she answered. "If I am to marry like a European woman, I will do as they do. If I do not like him afterwards, I will take a lover."

Ruggles gasped. The kitten seemed to be showing a little claw at the end of its velvet paw.

"You must n't say things like that," he protested. "Nice women don't ever think of that sort of thing."

Roxana smiled, and her white teeth flashed through the murk.

"If you loved me, I should never deceive you, effendi," she answered softly, and her lithe body swayed toward him. "You would never have to watch me. Aie — my dear —"

Her bare arms slipped up about his neck, and she rested her head for an instant on his chest. The odor of her hair was in his nostrils. Then she loosed him suddenly and rose with a little shudder.

"I will do as you tell me, Ruggles Effendi," said she.

CHAPTER XXI

RUGGLES met the brothers De Montereau and liked them, which sentiment was cordially reciprocated. "Un homme charmant et très distingué," was the verdict of the Frenchmen. Madame de Montereau, with the family solicitor, had an interview with Ruggles, the marriage settlements were drawn up, and a formal betrothal was announced. The double wedding was set for the first week in September.

The suit of the young Baron von Hertzfeld was also approved by Ruggles. Not only did he like and admire Von Hertzfeld, and believe that he would make Roxana a kind and dutiful husband, but he was anxious to see the girl safely married and established. There was something in the expression of her tawny eyes, when for a second they flashed into his, that made Ruggles nervous and ill at ease. He felt that he was dealing with a primitive nature, which he would never be able to understand and which contained high potentialities of mischief. He hoped that matrimony, with its attendant responsibilities, might tame the savage instincts that he was able to sense beneath his ward's quiet and self-contained exterior.

Roxana appeared to be quite content with the arrangement, and was much pleased with her en-

gagement ring and its superb diamond. The wedding was arranged for October, when Von Hertzfeld's family would be able to assist.

Meanwhile, the season advanced and, the heat of Paris growing oppressive, Ruggles rented a furnished villa at Le Touquet for the months of July and August, and removed his household thither. The brothers De Montereau ran down for every week-end, and on one of these outings they brought with them an intimate friend, who was a lieutenant in the army and a young man of good connections, though small personal fortune. His expectations were, however, of the best, — as Ruggles, anticipating another suitor, took the pains to assure himself, — so that when the young man's aunt formally requested in his behalf the hand of Rosa Ben Ali Hamid, Ruggles decided to give his consent, no doubt influenced to some degree by Rosa's impassioned pleadings that she might have her adored Marcel. Miss Elliot did not figure prominently in any of these negotiations.

One might think that Ruggles should have been a very happy man at so successful a fulfillment of his obligation to his late benefactor. Once his wards were married, he could say to himself: "I have carried out the instructions of Hamid Pasha in a manner which I know that were he living he would thoroughly approve. I am discharged of my responsibility and it remains now only for me to enjoy my wealth. I am young, in good health, with many

friends, and about one hundred thousand dollars a year to spend in the pursuit of happiness. The world is mine."

But Ruggles felt that the world was very far from being his. Mr. Falconer, who at Ruggles's invitation had come down to spend several days at his Le Touquet villa, had informed him that there was a rumor of Ruth Downing's engagement to a young Englishman of title, the Honorable Cecil Townsend, and at this news it seemed to Ruggles that all of the light had gone out of his life. He could no longer deceive himself in regard to his true state of heart toward Ruth. He knew that he loved her with an intensity which absorbed him, soul and mind and body, and that without her all else was a hollow mockery, and would always be.

The three days that she had spent with her aunt at the Carlton had crystallized Ruggles's distant adoration into a consuming passion the violence of which left him at times weak and shaken from its mere contemplation. There was in his heart a constant hunger for her which made him feel as though he were a mere shell; a receptacle for the containing of a mighty love. He had managed to see her twice on each of these days and Ruth and her aunt had accepted his invitation to dinner and the theater. Not only had she accepted him frankly as a friend, but she had shown a sweet and sympathetic interest in his affairs and his physical well-being and considered him in the light of a social equal.

Ruggles's views on class distinction had, however, undergone a revolution as the result of his personal experiences. As a shoe clerk in the service of the company he had considered himself the social equal of anybody, but now, as a millionaire and a man honored by the Padisha of the Ottoman Empire for distinguished gallantry on the field of battle, he had swung to the other extreme and held himself to be but a parvenu, an upstart, one of lowly origin who had been raised to fortune by a trick of fate. He did not consider himself to be in any sense Ruth's equal, nor did he expect the world at large to value him as such. He reflected that both his mother and father had been factory hands, and that he himself had first seen the light of day in a dingy workman's cottage under the shadow of the factory walls.

Had Ruggles been like certain others who have leaped from obscurity to great wealth, he would have paid some genealogist a hundred pounds to have provided him with a coat of arms and a few ancestral portraits and claimed relationship with the Ruggles of Hants or Kent or York or any old county, and have hung an etching of Totteringham Court-on-Slushy Water in a conspicuous part of his drawing-room. He might have presented the city of Paris with a statue or soup-kitchen for indigent absinthe-drinkers and tried for the red ribbon of the Légion d'Honneur. But he was not of this sort. He suffered in silence and tried to be strong.

But it required all of his strength to meet Mr. Falconer's announcement, in regard to Ruth's supposed engagement, with an unmoved face and a heart the weight of which proved almost too great a burden for an injured ankle. He managed to receive the news standing up, and to all outward appearance undismayed, but the faithful Mustapha, who had grown to love his youthful master, detected symptoms of fever that night and enjoined a day in bed, to which Ruggles wearily submitted.

Besides the crushing conviction that Ruth could never be his, there were certain other factors contributing to Ruggles's lack of cheer, which exercised the same proportion to the primary cause as might a series of mosquito bites to the victim of an encounter with a motor-car moving at a high velocity. The Misses Challand, Elliot, and Westbrooke had come to oppress his spirits both individually and collectively. It sometimes seemed to Ruggles that they had entered into a conspiracy for the betterment of his speech and manners; a sort of Society for the Social Improvement of Richard Ruggles.

As a matter of fact, he was not far wrong. It hurt Miss Challand's cultured, Miss Elliot's academic, and Darthea's æsthetic sensibilities that Ruggles should "sir" and "ma'am" new acquaintances; that he should be guilty of such vulgar expressions as "I sure do," or "it sort of seemed like," etc.; that he should know so little of art, literature, or music.

As tactfully as possible they tried constantly to put some polish on Ruggles, and it must be admitted their efforts were not in vain. He was quick to learn and seldom needed to be told a thing twice. With French people, however, he had the best of them, for his accent was better and his speech far more idiomatic than was theirs. Indeed, when conversing in French, Ruggles passed readily for a man of birth and education.

But aside from these petty annoyances he was bored by his new manner of life. Being a natural-born business man of inherent business ability, he did not take kindly to ease and idleness — especially in a "hen-house," as he sometimes thought to himself of his establishment. He sometimes wondered drearily what he was going to do when he should find himself alone again and with a bigger income than he could possibly spend. At such moments he thought wistfully of the company.

This sadness of Ruggles made him the more interesting to his household, none of whom — except-perhaps the devoted Mustapha, who had witnessed certain orisons — ascribed it to the proper cause. The others accepted it as a part of his convalescence, the pain which his ankle sometimes gave him, and the aftermath of his service with the Red Cross. It must be said that all did their utmost to cheer him, and it is probable that no young man was ever taken better care of.

Then one day Ruggles came in to luncheon with

such a high flush on his lean cheeks and so vivid a brightness in his eyes that Miss Elliot, on catching sight of him, feared that the fever brewed in the swamps flanking Derkos must have germinated again. Ruggles seemed nervous and excited. He had been watching the tennis on the courts of the Hermitage Hotel, and he had seen enter a big touring-car containing Ruth and Miss Downing. He announced this fact in as casual a voice as he was able to control.

"Really?" said Miss Challand. "Did you speak to them?"

"No," said Ruggles, "I just saw them pass."

"They've probably run over to meet Mr. Downing and his son on the Rotterdam, which is due to arrive at Boulogne to-morrow," said Darthea. "I saw in the 'Herald' about a week ago that they were among the passengers."

Ruggles helped himself to Chablis. He was conscious of a sudden irritation with Darthea for not having informed him of this all-important fact. He had never formed the habit himself of following the steamer sailings and social items, but he could not understand how anybody could fail to be interested at any time by the movements of any of the Downing family, or fail to comment on them. As a matter of fact, Darthea had commented on the circumstance, but Ruggles had not been present at the time.

This, then, was undoubtedly the reason of Ruth's

presence in Le Touquet, which is only a short run from Boulogne and a charming resort. Ruggles found himself suddenly deprived of appetite.

"I'm afraid you're not feeling well, Mr. Ruggles," said Miss Elliot, observing him decline a favorite dish.

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks," said Ruggles. "I guess I'll go over and call on Miss Downing and her aunt this afternoon and ask them to dinner. Miss Downing said, when I saw her last, that she wanted to meet the girls."

Roxana raised her tawny eyes slowly to Ruggles's face.

"Is she very pretty?" she asked.

"Yes," Ruggles answered, "and she's just as sweet and nice as she is pretty. You'll all be crazy about her."

"Are you crazy about her?" asked Roxana.

"My dear!" said Miss Challand, in mild reproof.

Ruggles smiled wearily.

"I guess everybody that knows her is crazy about her, Roxana," said he, and fell into an abstracted silence.

Roxana was rather silent, too, but, when unobserved, her eyes shot yellow gleams at Ruggles from under their long dark lashes. She had seen deeper into his soul than her less instinctive though more sophisticated mentors.

CHAPTER XXII

RUTH welcomed Ruggles as warmly as though they had been friends of years standing, which, indeed, on Ruggles's side, they had been.

"I'm so glad to see you," said she. "Do sit down and tell me all about yourself." She half-closed her eyes, and, with her head slightly aslant, gave him a brief but solicitous examination. "Do you know, you're not looking quite as robust as I'd hoped to see you. I believe you're thinner — and you seem lots older than when I saw you last."

Ruggles laughed. "Can you blame me?" he asked. "Four lively girls and three chaperones to watch is enough to take the fat off anybody, I guess."

"I should think it might be," Ruth agreed. "I'm crazy to meet them. Mr. Falconer has been in London for a few days, and he gave me a good deal of your news. So they're all engaged?"

"I should say they were!" Ruggles sighed. "I need a bell and blinders to go around my house, in spite of Miss Challand and Miss Elliot and Darthea and Sarah. Those girls take more watching than a Bulgarian advance column. Not that there's any harm in them," he added hastily, "but they're such a pack of kids — that is, all but Roxana."

"You know, you're a celebrity," said Ruth. "Have you seen the last 'Tattler'?"

"No," said Ruggles, "and I don't want to. I've seen enough silly stuff in the papers — and pictures, too. Only last week I took a fresh guy's camera away from him and threw it in the water." He did not add that on the vehement protest of the owner of the camera he had pitched him into the wash after his apparatus, to the intense delight of the beach. Ruggles detested anything in the character of a scene, which, however, had not prevented his being the central figure of several as the result of the popular interest in his peculiar household.

"Well," said Ruth, "there's no escaping the camera man in this day and age. There's a full-page picture of you and your pretty wards about to take your dip, and it's labeled: 'Richard Plantagenet Ruggles, Meteoric Millionaire, and his Lovely Wards, the Misses Ben Ali Hamid.' They *are* pretty!"

"Oh, there's no trouble about their looks," said Ruggles wearily. "Sometimes I've almost wished they were as homely as a huckleberry pie. However, they'll all be married pretty soon, thank goodness!"

Ruth laughed merrily. "I wonder you did n't fall in love with one of them yourself," said she.

Ruggles shook his head. "Don't tell me anything like that," said he, "because I don't believe it."

Ruth gave him a swift, sidelong look. They were sitting by an open window in the spacious *salon couloir* leading from the foyer to the dining-room of the hotel and looking out upon the grounds of the casino. They were quite alone, for the weather was fine and everybody was on the golf-links or the tennis-courts or the beach, with errant couples straying in the pine woods. Ruggles looked at Ruth, and his features tightened with something of the expression of a person who has a sore tooth and bites on it hard, with the idea of seeing how much pain he can stand.

"Speaking about engagements and falling in love and all that sort of thing," said he, "Mr. Falconer told me something about you —"

"The nasty old gossip! — even if he is a dear!" cried Ruth. "I know what he told you. He said that I was engaged to Cecil Townsend! Well, I'm not — nor ever was, nor ever will be! Just because we rode together a few times and he was — well — rather attentive, as all nice Englishmen are apt to be to American girls like myself, some foolish woman who writes for the society papers under the name of 'Faith,' 'Hope,' or 'Charity,' — jolly good names for them, too, — started an absurd rumor that we were engaged, or about to be. It was all nonsense. I would n't marry the Honorable Cecil Townsend if he were — well — if for my sake he were to become a shoe clerk in one of our stores — say the Vienna branch." She smiled maliciously at the panting

Ruggles. "If I ever marry, I'll marry some man who sees things the way I do, and who does n't try to hide the fact that the family fortune came from 'tryde.' My father's in 'tryde'—and my brother's in 'tryde,' and I'm darn proud of it! I'm a daughter of 'tryde,' and I don't take any odds from anybody! Do you get me?"

"I sure do," said Ruggles reverently. It seemed to him that a nightingale was singing in his heart.

"Well, then," said Ruth; "put all that Mr. Falconer told you out of your head. He's an old dear, but he's English, and that means that he's an old stupid." She glanced at her little pendant watch. "It's nearly four, and the tide is high at four. Let's go for a swim."

"That for me!" said Ruggles, with such a clarion enthusiasm that Ruth laughed.

"You seem very keen about it," said she. "You look like a different person at the mere suggestion."

"Oh, it's nice to be able to get in on something in the way of sport," said Ruggles, wondering if Ruth really thought that it was her suggestion of going to bathe that had so enlivened him. "Swimming and golf are about all I can manage, now, and it's not much fun to whack a ball a couple of hundred yards and then go limping after it."

"But you can ride and drive a car and sail," said Ruth.

"I'm not much of a rider," said Ruggles; "I

never had the chance to learn, and there's no exercise in driving a car. But I always like to swim and that's about the only thing that does n't seem to bother my ankle. But I can swim all day."

"Well, then, I'll get auntie, and we'll go down to the beach," she said.

Miss Downing seemed glad to see Ruggles and readily accepted his invitation for dinner. Like her niece, she was devoured with curiosity to see the Misses Ben Ali Hamid. Ruggles telephoned to the villa to say that there would be two more guests for dinner, — for Von Hertzfeld and the two De Montereaus were also expected, — then went down to the beach with Ruth and her aunt.

Ruggles scarcely recognized the rounded Aphrodite who strolled across the beach to where he was waiting at the water's edge. And Ruth was equally surprised at Ruggles's vigorous physique, for his lean face and limping gait gave the impression of a body scarcely robust. And here, on the contrary, was a youthful Triton, deep-chested, strongly muscled, with the suggestion of latent force and untiring energy.

As they swam seaward, Ruggles rolled on his side and, as his sinewy arm flashed clear of the water for its downward stroke, Ruth saw between shoulder and elbow a livid, triangular cicatrix.

"That 's an ugly scar on your arm," said she.

Ruggles smiled. "I got that from a sword bayonet in the fight I told you about," said he, "but it

never bothered me much. I guess I got off pretty lucky, with nothing worse than a smashed ankle."

"Is the man that gave you that jab in the arm still alive?" Ruth asked.

"No," Ruggles answered shortly. "Let's swim back. There's an offshore current out here."

They paddled slowly in and waded out on the beach. Thigh-deep, they turned as though impelled by a common impulse and looked at each other.

"It's funny," said Ruggles, "but after a good long swim I always feel as if I did n't belong on the land. I sort of hate to go ashore again and crawl about with the crowd." He gave a short laugh. "Maybe it's because it's sort of hard work to keep up with the procession."

"I think," said Ruth, "it's more apt to be because the procession finds it hard to keep pace with you."

Miss Downing and Ruth were charmed with Ruggles's wards, and found it difficult to believe that such *comme-il-faut* young ladies could possibly have grown up in a Turkish harem. Roxana, particularly, fascinated Ruth, who thought her the most beautiful creature she had ever seen, and told Ruggles so. But Ruggles did not enthuse. Once or twice during dinner he had caught a curious gleam in Roxana's golden eyes, as they rested on Ruth, which had given him a curious disquiet. There was

something in that veiled look which reminded him of the look in the eyes of a cat as it watches a bird from the ambush of a shrub.

The evening passed pleasantly, and when, late the following day, Ruggles went to the hotel to pay his respects to the Downings, he learned from Ruth that her father and brother had decided to go on to London for a few days' business trip. She and her aunt were to stop on at Le Touquet until their return, Miss Downing having found the combination of sea and pine woods most beneficial to her asthma.

The days which immediately followed were the happiest that Ruggles had ever known. He and Ruth were constantly together, on the beach or the golf-links, bathing, or running over the road in a light racing-car that Ruggles had purchased. It seemed to him that each passing day brought them closer in sympathy and understanding.

Darthea and Ruth became quite intimate, and one night, when Miss Downing was suffering from a headache, Darthea brought Ruth informally to dinner at the villa, which was situated at some little distance from the hotel in the midst of the pine woods, on a slight eminence which commanded a view of the sea. After dinner Ruggles, to his great disgust, was obliged to make a short call at the house of a neighbor, an Englishman, to arrange some details of a golf tournament for which Ruggles had offered a cup, in which event he had consented to serve on a committee. The business was

soon transacted, and Ruggles, excusing himself on the plea of an unexpected guest, returned to the villa, where he was met by Miss Challand, who wore a rather worried face.

"It's very odd, Mr. Ruggles," said she, "but I can't imagine what has become of Roxana and Miss Downing."

"What!" exclaimed Ruggles, with a curious presentiment of ill.

"They have disappeared," said Miss Challand nervously. "The other girls are all in the music-room. Bulbul and Rosa were singing, and Roxana and Miss Downing were talking together in a corner of the room when they presently got up and went out. I asked them where they were going, and Miss Downing said that Roxana had consented to show her the Circassian gesture dance, but that she would n't do it before the others. I thought nothing of that, knowing that Roxana is subject to such whims. Well, they went out about half an hour ago and have n't come back. I've been all over the house and through the gardens, but can't find a sign of them."

Ruggles was conscious of a most disagreeable hollow feeling at the pit of his stomach, and his mouth seemed suddenly to have gone dry. He had noticed that Roxana had looked odd during dinner and had wondered if she were ill.

"Have you said anything to anybody?" he asked.

"No," Miss Challand answered and, glancing at Ruggles's face, she went suddenly pale. "Why do you look that way? What do you think —"

"Oh, nothing," replied Ruggles, with an effort to make his tone natural. "It's just one of Roxana's freakish ideas. She probably took it into her head that she'd like to dance out in the moonlight. Don't say anything. I'll run out and take a look around. They may have just gone for a little walk in the pines."

He hurried through the rear of the house and out into the back garden, which was long and narrow, and with a sanded walk which ran straight down the center to a small iron door in the wall. This opened upon a little winding path which traversed the pine woods, and, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile fell upon a broad thoroughfare which ran from the casino and skirted Paris Plage, to come out upon the beach.

Ruggles paused at the gate and, striking a match, stooped to examine the sand. It showed the fresh imprints of two pairs of small, high-heeled shoes. Also, the bolt of the gate, always fastened at night, had been slid back. The two girls had plainly passed this way, and Ruggles hurried along the path as fast as his lameness would permit. It was not dark, for the moon was nearly full, but its light was partly shrouded by a thin, high sea-haze drifting in from the Channel. There was, however, no difficulty in following the path, despite the darkness of the pine

woods, and Ruggles pushed on, rather expecting to come presently upon the two girls, when the stillness of the place was disturbed by a distant scream.

It was not a loud scream and it sounded choked off, as though the person emitting it might have discovered its cause to have been something to give no alarm. Neither was it repeated, and Ruggles, after pausing an instant to locate its direction, which seemed directly on his path, hurried on, persuading himself that it must have been given by some girl taking a moonlight promenade with her beau and startled by some nocturnal bird or animal — a wood-rat or cat or owl or *chat-huant.* Nevertheless, he could not free his mind of a vague uneasiness, though he would have been unable to say of what. But it seemed to him a very odd thing that Roxana should have left the grounds with Ruth, first because she would know that such an act would be strongly disapproved by Miss Challand, Miss Elliot, and himself, and if she had wanted to dance in the moonlight the deserted gardens offered plenty of opportunity for such a performance.

The pines grew thicker, shutting off the vague light, and as Ruggles groped his way onward, he grew more and more uneasy. He remembered his scene with Roxana in Paris, and her assurance that, although he might dispose of her hand as he thought best, she would never love any other man

than himself. Also he recalled the fact that Roxana alone of his wards had not warmed to Ruth, and that recently both Miss Challand and Miss Elliot had commented to him on her distrait taciturnity, and had asked him if he thought that she was homesick or possibly discontented with the prospect of marrying Von Hertzfeld.

Presently Ruggles discovered that he could not be far from the main road, for he heard at no great distance the snorting of a high-powered motor, which appeared to have been that moment started, for there came a successive crash of gears as the driver went into the higher speeds. At the same moment he came out upon a *clairière*, or little opening in the pines, where the pale moonlight shone down upon the carpet of glistening pine-needles. As he did so, his eye was caught by a white object upon its farther side and partly in the shadow of the overhanging boughs.

Ruggles hurried toward it, and as he drew near, saw to his horror that it was the body of a woman in evening dress. She was lying on her face, her loosened hair tumbled about her naked shoulders, from which the light tulle of her gown had been torn away, and as Ruggles, sick with dread, dropped to the ground at her side and turned over the limp and senseless body, his heart seemed to stop its beating, for the pale moonlight was reflected from Ruth's pallid face.

With a choking gasp, he dropped his head, lay-

ing his ear upon her heart. There was a faint pulsation, and as he took her head upon his knee, he was struck aghast to find that her light scarf was twisted tightly about her throat and knotted there. It was the work of an instant to loosen it, and then, realizing that the girl was nearly strangled, Ruggles, who had assisted at one or two drowning accidents, lowered her head to the ground and, taking both her wrists, began to perform the rhythmic motions of artificial respiration.

But Ruth was suffering from shock, rather than from suffocation, though this latter might have come later. At the end of a minute or two, she gave a shuddering sigh, her lashes fluttered up, and her dark eyes stared at Ruggles unseeingly.

"What — what's the matter?" she asked drowsily.

"Don't try to talk, Ruth," said Ruggles huskily. "Take a few long breaths."

Ruth obeyed, inhaling the sweet, pine-scented night air in shuddering gasps. She struggled up, leaning against Ruggles, who drew the scarf about her bare throat and shoulders.

"Oh — oh —" she gasped.

Her head fell against Ruggles's chest and she began to sob. Ruggles held her close, soothing her as though she had been a little child. Presently her sobs ceased. She looked around her wildly.

"Never mind, dear," said Ruggles. "It's all right now. It's all right now."

"Where is she?" whispered Ruth. "Oh, why did she — oh, I remember now. It was because of — of you —" She thrust herself away from Ruggles, and, dropping her face into her hands, sat sobbing with silent violence while her abundant hair fell down to cover neck and bosom.

Ruggles slipped off his dinner coat and buttoned it about her. Presently Ruth managed to control herself and letting fall her hands turned and looked into his face.

"How — could — you?" said she, in a low, vibrating voice.

"How could I what, Ruth?" Ruggles asked. He put his arm about her shoulders to draw her to him again, for she was swaying as she sat.

Ruth shrank away. "Don't!" said she. "Don't touch me! I've got to think —"

She was silent for several moments. Then Ruggles, whose mind was working rapidly, as it was wont to do in crises, said gently:—

"Don't try to think now, dear. It's too awful. If you feel able, try to walk back to the house. It's not far, and I'm afraid Miss Challand may raise an alarm, and you must n't be seen like this. We can slip in by the back door, and you can go right up and go to bed. I'll telephone to your aunt that you have been taken ill and we think you'd better spend the night."

Ruth struggled to her feet before Ruggles could offer his hand. She was a strong girl and courageous,

and now that the first shock had passed, violent anger was beginning to take possession of her, which was perhaps the best thing that could have happened.

"Very well," said she, in a low voice. "I can walk. Don't touch me, please."

And they started back along the dim-lit path.

CHAPTER XXIII

MISS CHALLAND, her salts in one hand, a moist handkerchief in the other, and her prominent green eyes glaring like those of a cat, came into the study where Ruggles was sitting with a pale, tense face and closed the door behind her. They had got Ruth into the house unobserved and she was now in bed, moving restlessly from side to side.

"Well," said Miss Challand, "if the poor child gets through it without brain fever, it'll be a wonder. I must say, though, she seems more angry than shocked or frightened — and that's a jolly good thing. No sign of that savage girl?"

Ruggles shook his head.

"Did you telephone to Von Hertzfeld?"

"Yes. They told me at the hotel that he received a message at dinner and left in his car immediately, after saying that he had been called to London by a sudden case of illness in his family and would cross on the midnight boat from Calais."

"Then there 's nothing to do but wait for some news of Roxana," said Miss Challand. "We don't want a scandal, if only for the sake of the other girls, and she can't get far with no money and nothing to her back but an evening dress. No doubt she'll come slinking in presently like an escaped leopardess crawling back to the cage. She's mad."

Miss Challand then went on to tell Ruggles what she had learned from Ruth. It appeared that, while talking with Roxana after dinner, the wild Georgian girl had suggested that they slip out for a little stroll in the moonlight. When Ruth, not feeling this to be a polite thing to do, had demurred, Roxana had said that if she would go with her for a few minutes, she would show her the Circassian dance for which Ruth had often asked in vain and which Roxana said was much more effective in the moonlight. Ruth finally consenting, they had gone out. Whereupon Roxana had insisted on leaving the grounds, not wishing, as she said, to be observed from the house, as the dance was not an entirely conventional one, in its true interpretation. Ruth, full of curiosity and the spirit of adventure, had finally been persuaded.

Roxana had then conducted her to the clearing in the woods, and there, turning suddenly, had addressed her in such language as is sometimes employed by Turkish harem women of a dissolute class, and with a fury and a passion that had appalled the American girl. She had accused Ruth of all sorts of unspeakable things which had to do with Ruggles, who, Roxana said, was her own lover. Ruth, startled and terrified, was beginning to believe the girl insane and pluckily thinking up some way of defending herself from the physical attack which she felt sure would follow the verbal one, when Roxana had snatched from her bosom a vial

of what Ruth had rightly guessed to be vitriol and had attempted to dash it into Ruth's face.

But here the ex-slave girl had reckoned without her host. Ruth, though of far less than Roxana's size and strength, was lacking neither in strength nor courage. Seeing her danger, she had sprung at Roxana and gripped her wrists. In the struggle that had followed, the flask had dropped into the bushes and been lost. Roxana had fought like a tigress, and Ruth with the strength of desperation. But the Georgian had proved more than a match for her antagonist, finally flinging her to the ground and twisting her scarf around her neck, then making off through the pines.

"It's just about as awful as anything could be," said Miss Challand finally. "I always had a feeling that Roxana was far from civilized, and so had Miss Elliot, though Darthea liked and admired her. What's to be done? We've got to hush the thing up. But we can't let Hertzfeld marry her. It would n't be right."

Ruggles glanced at his watch. "I guess we won't be able to help ourselves — or Hertzfeld either," said he.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, as I dope it out," said Ruggles, "Hertzfeld and Roxana are probably landing at Dover, just about now. Do you know, Miss Challand, I believe it was Roxana who sent that message to Von Hertzfeld. She probably told him that something

had gone wrong with her here, and that she would n't stay in the place any longer, and that he could take her to England to-night and marry her by special license to-morrow, or not at all. And Hertzfeld, being head over heels in love, took her up on it."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Challand.

"I heard a big car starting down on the road when I was hustling through the woods," said Ruggles, "and now that I think of it, it sounded like that sixty Mercedes of Von Hertzfeld's. The same sort of cough and roar. Of course, he probably thought that Roxana had been disciplined by some of us and would n't stand for it. Well, so much the worse for him. I don't see how we can help it now."

He got up and took one or two limping steps, then paused in front of the elderly Englishwoman and looked her squarely in the eyes.

"It's my own darn fault for not having been more on my guard," said he. "I had Roxana sized up from the very start as a savage. Pembroke wanted to marry her, and I went out to Constantinople to prevent it. She made love to me in Paris, and I told her that there was nothing doing, and that she'd got to put it all out of her head. She never made any fuss, and promised to marry anybody I wanted her to. It might have gone through all right if she had n't seen that I was in love with Ruth Downing. But that was more than that tigress nature of hers could stand. So she made up her mind on the spur of the moment to ruin Ruth's

beauty and elope with Von Hertzfeld. It struck me to-night at dinner that she was looking sort of wild. I ought to have kept my eye on her."

Miss Challand sank into a chair and sniffed her salts. "Fancy such things in this day and age!" said she.

Ruggles's face hardened. "Roxana does n't belong to this day and age," said he. "Ruth has had a mighty close call. I don't believe Roxana meant to kill her when they started out, but she meant something just as bad, if not worse. When Ruth knocked the bottle out of her hand, she saw red and decided to strangle her. And now" — his face grew even whiter and more tense — "I suppose nothing will ever make Ruth believe that she did n't have more reason for doing it than just because she took a fancy to me and I laid down the law to her that she was my ward and nothing more."

Miss Challand shook her head. Then, at sight of Ruggles's drawn features, she rose from her chair and, stepping to where he sat, patted him gently on the shoulder.

"My dear boy," said she, "I 'm afraid it 's going to be rather hard — but we'll do the best we can. You may be sure that you shall have all of my help and sympathy."

Ruggles seized her hand in his. "Thank you, Miss Challand," said he. "It sure means an awful lot to me."

And Miss Challand did not correct the synco-

pated adverb. She said merely that Ruth agreed with her that the affair must be kept strictly secret.

Ruggles's shrewd surmise in regard to Von Hertzfeld proved to be correct. The following day brought a letter written him by Von Hertzfeld on the Calais-Dover boat. In it the young man offered infinite apologies for the step that he had taken and his apparent abuse of Ruggles's confidence and many kindnesses. As excuse, he said that the possibility of losing Roxana had been something that he had not had the strength to contemplate and, knowing her varying moods and intense nature, he could do no more than follow her instructions. He trusted that Ruggles, who had already approved his suit, would understand and sympathize with him in his apparently ungrateful behavior. And considerably more to the same effect. Ruggles did understand — and there was no question of his sympathy with the misguided young man. He would himself have as soon thought of forming an alliance with a trapped lioness. But he reflected that perhaps Von Hertzfeld might prove himself a *dompteur de fauves*. Which possibly he may have done.

But Ruggles's chief concern was not for the principals of this runaway match. Ruth had appeared the following morning, a little pale and quiet, but none the worse for her experience. Of the entire household, only Ruggles and Miss Challand were cognizant of the true facts. The others supposed that Ruth had been persuaded by Rox-

ana to connive at her elopement, and that this had made a certain coolness between Ruggles and herself. For that a coolness existed was most apparent. Ruth returned to the hotel, and for several days Ruggles mooned about with set features and tightened lips. He had tried to see Ruth without avail. And in the mean time, Mr. Downing and Dick arrived, and a golf chum of Ruggles, who put up at the hotel, told him that the family were leaving within a day or two for Scotland.

Ruggles made no further efforts to see Ruth or any of the Downings. He felt sick and sore. He reasoned that if Ruth, knowing him as well as she did, could believe that any act of his might have been responsible for Roxana's furious attempt at vengeance, there could not exist between them that sympathy which had seemed to be an established covenant. Everything was sham. All human emotions were empty shells. He sat on the beach and stared out across the drab waters of the Channel, and wished that he might conscientiously drown himself therein.

It was perhaps with this furtive suggestion — not that he had any idea of drowning himself, of course, but for the sake of the mere melancholy contemplation — that he went down to swim one afternoon when the weather was not such as to appeal to the casual bather. The air was humid and oppressive, yet carried a distinct chill. No breeze had stirred for hours, and the water was as motionless

and flat as a skating-rink. Never a ripple lapped the beach, and at some distance from the shore the near horizon fetched up in a sluggish blanket of fog. The tide was far out and still running ebb, and so dark and dismal were all bathing conditions, as compared with the cheer of golf and tennis and the grounds of the casino, that Ruggles found himself practically alone.

But not entirely alone, for a long way out a speck of crimson was melting into the gray haze that introduced the fog. It caught Ruggles's quick eye and sent a shock through him, for Ruth tied up her dark tresses in a crimson kerchief when going into the sea. But he could not believe that it was Ruth, for there were no signs of any of her family, and he did not think that she would have been allowed to bathe unattended by even a maid — which was quite true, if any of her family had known what she was up to.

Ruggles waded and waded and waded until it seemed to him that he must have walked halfway to England. Then, the water deepening suddenly, he flung himself forward and started out to investigate the red kerchief. It occurred to him that whoever might be under it was certainly getting farther out than was prudent with the conditions of the tide. And then, as it continued seaward, he was filled with the sudden conviction that it must be Ruth. He did not believe that there was another woman in Europe who would be rash enough to

swim straight out into that thickening mist and through those chill, threatening waters; also, he was sure that she had seen him and wished to avoid him.

For an instant he was on the point of turning back, if only to keep from driving her into danger. He compromised by floating about without swimming farther seaward. Then the crimson kerchief disappeared utterly, swallowed up in the incoming fog, and, glancing shoreward, Ruggles discovered that the beach had likewise disappeared. That settled it; he turned on his side and swam straight out through the stagnant water with its wispy wreaths of fog.

Presently the gray, elusive opacity was all about him. He rolled over and tried to peer beneath it, and was successful, in so far that he saw the crimson kerchief not very far ahead. It appeared to be motionless, and Ruggles swam slowly in that direction. As he drew nearer, Ruggles saw that it was indeed Ruth, lying on her back and paddling slowly outward. He splashed a little to attract her attention. She looked up, turned in the water, and stared at him without a smile.

"Well, here we are again, Mr. Ruggles," said she.

"You 're too far out," said Ruggles. "You 'd better start back. Do you remember what I told you about the offshore current?"

"But I am swimming back," said Ruth. "I've been swimming back for the last ten minutes."

"I guess you must have got sort of turned around," said Ruggles. "Sometimes you do when you've been floating."

"You must be turned around yourself," Ruth retorted. "The beach is straight in there." Her arm flashed clear of the water and pointed in the general direction of Beachy Head.

"I don't think so," said Ruggles. "I should say it was just opposite."

Her eyes opened very wide, and she pushed back a wisp of black hair which had escaped from beneath the crimson kerchief.

"Listen," said Ruggles. "Maybe we can hear something from the shore."

They paddled silently under the surface. For a moment or two there was not a sound, the dense fog seeming to have quenched noise as well as vision. Then, in the nervous stillness, there came from far in the distance — and, as it seemed to Ruggles, straight out in the Channel — the *honk-honk* of an automobile horn and the faint pulsation of a running motor. The girl turned a triumphant face toward Ruggles.

"A motor-car," said she. "I knew I was right."

"It looks like you were," Ruggles admitted. "I can't see, though, how I got so turned around. But then I was swimming on my back, too. Even now it don't seem right, somehow."

"It's got to be," she answered. "There it goes again —"

Once more the *honk-honk* reached their ears, distant and muffled in the mist. There could be no doubt as to its direction.

"Come on," said the girl, and turned on her side.

Together they swam ahead with long, even strokes, swimming straight out into the treacherous Channel, whither a passing motor-boat heading in for Étaples had lured them. Ten minutes passed; fifteen minutes; and still no shore sounds reached their ears. The chill of the water began to strike through them. The girl's face, as she looked back at Ruggles, showed the growing fright that was stealing over her.

"We were out far," said she.

But Ruggles scarcely heard her. A peculiar aspect of the water about them had attracted his attention. Where formerly it had been as flat and undisturbed as the surface of a mill-pond, there now appeared peculiar wrinkles and broad, bland swirls, as though some deep current were thrusting up from beneath. He felt his body turn, as though caught in an eddy. The girl discovered it also.

"What 's that?" she cried, in sudden alarm.

"Tide," Ruggles answered. "The place is full of currents when you get away offshore. I'm going to shout for help."

He filled his lungs and sent as much voice as he was capable of out into the fog; then listened. Not a sound came in answer. The silence of oblivion seemed to rest on the face of the water. He looked

at the girl. The terror in her face went into him like a knife. There were dark shadows under her eyes and her lips were quivering.

"I'm afraid it's all up with us," said she faintly. "I can't go on much longer."

"Put your hand on my shoulder and rest," said Ruggles. "I'm game for a good while yet."

She did as he told her, and Ruggles swam on slowly. The eddies turned and twisted them about, and soon all sense of direction was lost. The tide flowing out of the estuary of Étaples was carrying them swiftly out and to the westward. The strongest swimmer alive could not have gained the beach under those conditions. Ruggles began to tire.

"I'll swim again," said the girl presently. "I'm getting numb with cold. Have you any idea which way the shore is now?"

"No," Ruggles answered. "But it would n't make much difference if I had. We're in the offshore current. Even the Channel swimmers can't buck against that."

"Then it's all up with us, I suppose," she said lifelessly.

"Not by a good deal," Ruggles answered. "If we can keep afloat awhile longer, we're pretty apt to get picked up by some of the fishing-boats that go out of Étaples with the tide. I'll shout again."

He did so, but as before without result. Then, glancing at his companion, he saw that she seemed

to be settling in the water. He caught her with his left hand and drew her to his shoulder.

"Hang on to me," he gulped. "I'm not tired."

He no longer tried to make onward progress, merely paddling to keep them both afloat as long as possible. The eddies grew more violent, twirling them about like driftwood. The day was growing darker. And then, as Ruggles's ears were beginning to hum and black bands to pass before his eyes, he sighted some object on the water at one side. Putting out his waning strength he struggled toward it, and as he drew near he discovered it to be a large pine packing-case, thrown overboard, perhaps, from some passing liner.

"Here's something to hang to," said he, and reached it in a few strokes.

The girl roused herself. "What's the use?" said she drowsily. "If we've got to drown, let's drown and get it over with."

"We're not going to drown," said Ruggles stubbornly. "You hang on to this box and I'll let out a few yells from time to time. This place is full of fishing-boats, only we can't see 'em on account of the fog. Are you cold?"

"Not now. I don't feel anything at all. Only sleepy."

"Well, then, keep awake. Be a sport. We'll get picked up. You just wait and see."

They clung to either side of the crate, which, while not sufficient to support their weight, was yet

buoyant enough to keep their heads above water. From far in the distance, a fog whistle reached their ears and this first sound which had broken the deadly silence acted as a stimulant. The girl seemed to rouse herself, and her eyes rested for a moment curiously on Ruggles's face.

"I wonder where we'll be in a few hours," she asked.

"Oh, we'll be all right," Ruggles answered comfortingly. "Say, you don't seem to be hanging on as you ought to. Let's lie across this thing, and I'll hold you on."

"All the strength seems to have gone out of my arms," she answered.

"Here, wait a minute."

Ruggles swarmed up across the bottom of the crate, thus submerging it, then drew the girl to his side. Passing his arm around her, he jammed his fingers into a slot between two planks; then so arranged their bodies that they floated at an angle of forty-five degrees, their heads and shoulders clear of the brine.

"Now you can't slip off if you should try," said he. "Put your arm around my neck and hook your fingers in between the planks."

Ruth did as he told her, and for some time they floated thus locked together. The cold had ceased to trouble them, for the skin surfaces had grown numb.

"I feel sleepy," said Ruth presently.

"So do I," said Ruggles, "but we must n't give in to it. If we did, it would soon be all up with us."

"I think it is, anyhow," said Ruth. "But somehow I don't seem to care much. If it were n't for father and Dick, I don't believe I'd care at all." She turned her head, which was almost against Ruggles's. In fact, her cold cheek touched his as she changed her position. "I'm sorry I was so nasty about Roxana," she said. "I knew all the time that it was n't your fault — but I could n't help thinking that perhaps —"

"Never mind that now," said Ruggles. "There was never any 'perhaps' about it — and don't wobble this thing any more than you can help, Ruth, or you might tip it over."

"I don't care much if it does tip over," said Ruth. "I'm so tired —"

"Well, I do," said Ruggles. "Let me tell you something, Ruth. There's a lot more than we realize back of all this. We're not going to drown. My father and mother killed themselves working for your family, and your family never knew it. I guess the Ruggles were made by God Almighty to work for the Downings, and it's all just kismet, as the Turks say. Now here I am working to save your life, and I'm going to do it, too! I saw you out there farther than you ought to have been, and went out to look after you. We got mixed up, I guess. What you took for an automobile was a motor-boat running down for Étaples. I thought

about that too late. But never mind. There's a Ruggles on this job, and I've got a hunch that he's going to make good and get you out of trouble. I had the same hunch when I was a-straddle of Hamid Pasha, smashing the heads off the Bulgarians. All you've got to do now is to keep your courage up and stick it out. I guess we've got sand enough to keep us going for quite a lot of hours yet, and we're bound to get picked up as soon as it gets light. And let me tell you something else —" He laid his cheek against hers. "You've got a debt to pay to the Ruggles family. And I'm here to claim it. From now on you belong to me, living or dead — do you understand, dear?"

"Yes — I understand. How dark it's getting! Where does that light come from — or is it just the flashing in my eyes?"

"That's Le Touquet light," Ruggles answered. "It began to flash just before we found this crate. Only for that, I might never have seen it. Ruth" — he raised her head in his hands — "Kiss me."

She raised her pallid lips to his; then let her head sink against his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE small steam yacht Rêveuse, nosing her way through the fog at nightfall, toward Boulogne, was hailed from the murk by distant cries for help.

The forward lookout heard them first on the starboard bow, and reported to the bridge. A moment later they came from close aboard on the starboard beam, and Monsieur Pelleu, the celebrated etcher, who was on the bridge with his sailing-master, distinguished a dark, floating object not far away. The yacht was promptly stopped and a boat lowered, Monsieur Pelleu himself taking the yoke-lines. Thus facing forward, he soon discovered a man and a girl in bathing costume clinging to what appeared to be a capsized boat or piece of wreckage. As his gig drew near, Monsieur Pelleu observed the man clasp his companion in his arms and kiss her repeatedly.

"Ha! They will not perish," said Monsieur Pelleu to himself.

Ruth and Ruggles were lifted into the boat by the strong arms of the Breton sailors and taken aboard the yacht in so exhausted a condition that they had to be carried up the accommodation ladder. Yet, in spite of this fatigue, neither appeared to be in by any means a critical condition. On the con-

trary, there shone from the face of each a peculiar luminosity.

"Behold the power of love!" said Monsieur Pelleu to himself.

Madame Pelleu was aboard the yacht with her maid, and the two took Ruth immediately in hand, giving her first hot water with brandy and sugar followed by a brisk friction, then to bed with hot-water bags and copious draughts of tisane. Ruggles, after a dose of cognac and a brisk rub by the steward, felt sufficiently restored to dress in a suit of flannels borrowed from his host, a man of about his build, and to go out into the saloon. The steward had informed him that the yacht was from Dinard and bound for Boulogne, to meet some guests expected to arrive from Folkestone the following morning.

They were even then cautiously approaching the Boulogne breakwater. Monsieur Pelleu was on the bridge with his sailing-master while Madame was occupied with Ruth. Ruggles stretched himself out upon the cushions and tried to realize what had happened to him. He felt no great reaction from the mental and physical strain through which he had just passed. Some potent elixir strengthened and sustained him, and with it was an emotion of wonder and awe and devotional gratitude. He felt himself to be a favored one of God.

It was not alone for the preservation of his life

and being the instrument for the preservation of Ruth. Something far greater than life had been vouchsafed him. Ruth had come to him as a divine gift. Elemental forces had bestowed her. He looked at the door of the stateroom from behind which came the low murmur of voices and his eyes gushed over. He thought of the briny kisses exchanged and his body shook with tremors compared to which all previous emotions were as the fluttering wings of a hummingbird.

These emotions were interrupted by the flashing of lights through a porthole and Ruggles saw that they were off the port. A moment later the engines stopped, went astern, stopped again, and the little vessel quivered as the anchor took the water and the chain cable spun out through the hawse-pipe. Monsieur Pelleu came below and expressed his gratification at finding Ruggles in so good condition. Then Madame Pelleu came out with the encouraging news that Ruth had broken into a gentle perspiration and had fallen asleep.

The gig was ordered at once and Monsieur Pelleu went ashore in person to telephone to Le Touquet the news of the rescue and to give orders that Ruggles's car should be sent for him the following morning with such of his clothes as he needed. The kindly artist would not hear of Ruggles's leaving the yacht that night, even insisting that he should have his dinner in his berth, in which excellent advice Madame Pelleu seconded him

warmly. So Ruggles, who was feeling very drowsy, thanked them and retired, falling at once into so deep a sleep that he was with difficulty roused by the steward, who brought him a bowl of broth and a jug of milk.

When he awoke the next morning, the light was streaming through his porthole. From overhead came the murmur of many voices. Ruggles rang for the steward, who came in at once with his valise.

"Mademoiselle Challand is on deck," said the steward, "and wishes to see monsieur as soon as convenient. Monsieur Downing is there, also, and his son, the brother of mademoiselle."

In answer to Ruggles's question in regard to Ruth, the steward replied that she was entirely recovered and on deck with the others.

Ruggles swung his feet over the edge of his bunk and sat for a moment trying to collect his thoughts. The air was close, and, seeing that the stateroom had a deck ventilator, he opened it. As he did so, there came down to him a murmur of conversation, in which he recognized Ruth's voice and a resonant bass that he correctly supposed belonged to her father.

A sudden misgiving swept over him, and his heart sank. He forgot his millions, forgot his notoriety, forgot his newly acquired position and his many new-formed friends. Or, rather, the moral support of all these things seemed suddenly to desert him. There, just overhead, was this man whom

he had always so revered, Richard P. Downing, whom but a little over a year before he, Ruggles, had been serving on his knees—with button-hook and shoe-horn, the humblest of employees, and whom his parents had served before him as factory operatives.

Only the night before he had been actually in mind to ask this great man for the hand of his only daughter — and on what grounds? Merely because he had been swept with her out into the Channel and had encouraged her to cling to a floating box until rescued.

This, at least, was how the situation now appealed to him. He wondered if good fortune had turned his head. Was there one chance in a thousand that Mr. Downing would so much as listen to his demand? What did it matter to him that Ruggles was a millionaire; that through a freak of fortune he had incurred the gratitude of Hamid Pasha and been raised to an unmerited position? What did that show — and what right did it give him to aspire to Ruth?

Had he worked his way to a high place through industry and ability, it might have been different, Ruggles told himself. Instead of this he had disgraced himself in his occupation and brought discredit on his employers. He had shown himself a ruffian and a brawler. He was an adventurer, a parvenu—and with it all he was still Ruggles; formerly "No. 7" in the Paris store.

And what of Ruth? What right had he to take advantage of a girl who was at the point of exhaustion and with death staring her in the face, to claim an obligation and demand so rich a reward? What if he had held her in his arms and prevailed upon her to receive his kisses and extracted a promise, the purport of which he doubted that, in her fearful stress of mind and body, she was able at the time to realize?

Would not any girl so taken have acted as Ruth had done? Would not any girl have assented to whatever he might have said and passively endured his caresses? Would not any girl have welcomed, in her dread of approaching dissolution, the grasp of strong arms and the comforting assurance that she was not to slip alone into the chill depths below?

Ruggles grew hot with shame at the recollection of his wild words and actions. It seemed to him that he had played the part of coward rather than a hero, and that to attempt to profit by it now would be the performance of a cad. No, it could not be done. His emotions of the night before had been the result of shock and fatigue and the reaction from past danger. If ever he were to have Ruth, he must win her fairly by faithfulness and industry, and not through a series of blind accidents. Even now, it was possible that she might remember enough of what had occurred to be dreading the fulfillment of her faltered pledge.

"She need n't worry," muttered Ruggles to him-

self. "Unless she gives me some reason, I'll never remind her of it."

He made his toilet, drinking his coffee as he dressed; then went on deck. His resolution had brought back dignity and self-possession. Scarcely glancing for the instant at the others of the group, he walked straight to Ruth, whose face at his approach glowed with a sudden rosy light.

"Good-morning, Miss Downing," said he quietly. "I hope you are feeling all right again."

Ruth's eyes which had brightened at the sight of him, were filled with a swift questioning; and then, as they met Ruggles's steady gaze, the light seemed to fade from them. She thanked him in a low voice and introduced him to her father, who took Ruggles's hand in his strong grip and in a few simple words, free from sentimentality, he thanked him for the service that he had rendered his daughter; then he made way for his son. The Downings had run over to Boulogne in their car immediately on receiving Monsieur Pelleu's telephone message the night before. But on going aboard the yacht and learning that the two castaways were asleep, they had returned to the Pavilion Hotel.

As it was nearly time for the arrival of the Folkestone boat, on which the Pelleus expected their guests, the party made their adieus with many expressions of thanks and were set ashore at the quay, where the two cars were awaiting them. On the way ashore, Mr. Downing told Ruggles that he had

been greatly interested in his singular fortunes and his guardianship of the Misses Ben Ali Hamid, and even chaffed him mildly on the sudden elopement of Roxana, which incident had, of course, found its way into the press. Ruggles turned rather cold and wondered what Mr. Downing would say if he should ever learn the terrible facts connected with the affair and the narrow escape of his beloved daughter from mutilation and death.

To change the subject, he began to talk about the company. Ruggles had also a deeper motive in this topic, and decided to take this opportunity of making a proposition which he had been seriously considering for some time. With this object in view, he said to Mr. Downing, as they stepped out on the quay: —

"I wonder if you'd mind riding back with me in my car, sir? I'm a stockholder in the company now, and there are some things I'd like to talk to you about."

Mr. Downing looked rather surprised, but readily assented, whereupon Ruggles asked Dick Downing if he would kindly take Miss Challand back with him. The matter being thus arranged, the party was divided, and before getting into the limousine after Mr. Downing, Ruggles said to his chauffeur:—

"Drive slowly, Henri. We are in no hurry."

He was rather silent as the big car glided through the city and started to climb the long hill. Mr. Downing leaned back in his seat, lighted a cigar,

and waited for Ruggles to begin. But it was not until they were on the open road that Ruggles came out of his apparent abstraction. He looked at his companion and smiled.

"I've got such a lot to say," he explained naïvely, "that I'm trying to get it sort of framed up before I start. First off, I guess I'd better tell you something about myself. Then you'll understand better what comes afterwards."

Mr. Downing nodded. "That's always a good plan," said he.

So, with no preamble of any sort, Ruggles proceeded to describe the services rendered to the company in the past by his father and himself. He told of his ambition and his hopes of being made the manager of the Vienna branch, his disappointment, and what it had led him to. He spared neither himself nor others. He narrated the facts precisely as they had occurred.

Once or twice during this part of the tale Mr. Downing was on the point of interrupting, but he held his peace. His cigar went out.

Ruggles then passed to his service in the Balkans with the Red Cross. He described briefly his defense of Hamid Pasha, laying no stress upon his valor, but as from the start confining himself briefly to facts and leaving the details to the imagination. Mr. Downing was not lacking in imagination. Every promoter of every big successful enterprise is endowed with this quality in its soundest

sense. Ruggles told of his convalescence and the last days of Hamid Pasha, when they sat upon the terrace of the palace reading Swinburne and discussing life immortal. Mr. Downing raised his bushy eyebrows, and the glances which he threw at Ruggles were no longer merely curious. That magnetism, which was the boy's birthright and had its source in absolute honesty of thought and word and deed, making it impossible for him to be aught than purely natural, found its full effect upon a man who owed the whole of his success to a keen and correct estimate of men and motives. Ruggles was quite unconscious of this divine gift. Had he been conscious of it, he would not have possessed it long. But others were conscious of it. Customers had felt it; Pembroke had felt it; Mr. Falconer had felt it; Hamid Pasha had felt it; Miss Elliot had felt it; and now Mr. Downing was feeling it. Of all the people with whom he had come in intimate contact the two who had felt it least were Darthea and Miss Challand; Darthea, because she was herself too self-centered, and Miss Challand, because she was hide-bound with insular prejudice.

Ruggles then told of the fortune left him by Hamid Pasha and its entailed responsibilities. Mr. Downing relighted his cigar and then let it go out again. Ruggles described how, after certain difficulties, he had managed to fulfill his sacred obligation and get the girls safely betrothed to estimable husbands-elect. Mr. Downing wondered if he were

living in the twentieth century. All of this narration was marvelously condensed, yet lacking in no important detail. The story of Genesis in Holy Writ might have been Ruggles's model for comprehensive concentration. It was at this point that he gave pause.

"Now the thing that's been sort of bothering me, Mr. Downing," said he, "is what I'm going to do with myself afterwards. These girls will all get married off this fall, and then my job's over, so far as they're concerned. Now, I don't care anything about this sort of a life. Believe me, sir, some men are made to work and some to play, and I guess I'm one of the working kind. I liked to work for the company until it did me dirt and I lost my head and made a fool of myself. But, you see, I'd sort of outgrown that job. I knew that I was fit for something better. But let me tell you, sir, I've been homesick for the company ever since I left it. And I've got some big ideas for it —" And Ruggles proceeded to elaborate, though in scant words, his imperial policy for the company — the sun never to set on the Walkeasy shoe. Downing listened and his eyes gleamed. He was himself a builder.

"The way I'm fixed now," said Ruggles, "the company don't need to run any risk in giving me what I want. I won't ask any salary until I've made good. I hold a big block of our stock" — the "our" slipped out unconsciously and Mr. Downing

noted it and smiled on either side of his dead cigar — "and if need be I've got a couple of million dollars to back my theories. Why, Mr. Downing, if this thing is handled right, with the right men in the right places, we could shoe the whole world."

Mr. Downing relighted his cigar for the third or fourth time.

"I suppose," said he, "your first step would be to fire the managers of the Paris and Vienna shops."

"Why?" Ruggles demanded. "I don't see any use in that. Durand has made good in Paris, and they tell me that Lorenz is beginning to make good in Vienna. He's getting all the high-class retail trade. I went to work to find out, and I understand he's doing first-rate."

"But they handed you the double cross," said Mr. Downing to the ragged end of his cigar.

"What earthly difference does that make?" Ruggles demanded heatedly. "So long as they can sell the goods, they're the men for the jobs."

"How about the European general manager?" asked Mr. Downing.

"Why, he's all right, I guess," Ruggles answered. "Where I made my mistake was in not going to see him myself, like Lorenz did. I took too much for granted. I was mad clean through at the time, but I saw it differently afterwards. He only did what he thought was for the best interest of the company."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, son," said Mr.

Downing heartily. "I thought that maybe you wanted his position."

Ruggles shook his head. There was a flush on his cheeks and his eyes were very bright. "No, sir," said he, "I don't want anybody's job. What I want is a new one all of my own. I want the general managership of the Far East — Asia and India and Australia. I want to see the Walkeasy shoe for sale in Colombo and Bombay and Calcutta and Singapore and Sydney and Melbourne and Manila and Hongkong and Yokohama. The California people can look after Honolulu — and there must be a fine field."

Mr. Downing tossed his cigar through the window. There was a flush on his own cheeks now.

"It's a big idea," said he, "but I don't see why not. Look here, can't you come to dine with us tonight? And afterwards we can go over this thing with my boy, Dick." He gave Ruggles a quizzical smile. "You seem to have got the thing pretty well worked out," said he.

"I've thought about it a lot," Ruggles answered. "It ain't so much the money proposition, because goodness knows I've got more money than I can spend, right now. It's just the idea of doing something big."

"Yes," Mr. Downing assented, taking out a fresh cigar, "after all, that's the main thing."

CHAPTER XXV

As the Downing's big limousine entered the grounds of Ruggles's villa, it passed Darthea, fresh and charming in white linen and a little hat to match. Dick flung his big shoulders forward and nearly twisted his head off in the effort to keep her in sight.

"Is that one of 'em?" he asked. "Oh, I say, she *is* pretty!"

"That is my niece, Miss Westbrooke," said Miss Challand primly.

Dick jerked back his head, subsided against the cushions, and suffered submissively Ruth's vicious little kick on the ankle.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he mumbled. "My head was so full of these Oriental beauties that I forgot about there being other girls. Awfully sorry, I'm sure —"

The car came to a stop and Miss Challand descended and presented Dick to Darthea, who had followed the car to the house. Dick immediately forgot the Oriental beauties, who happened at that moment to be examining him with the greatest interest through the jalousies of an upper window. Declining Miss Challand's invitation to enter, Ruth told the chauffeur to go to the hotel, where she sat for half an hour on the terrace, impatiently

awaiting her parent, and saying to herself highly unflattering things about the speed of Ruggles's limousine. When finally she saw it approaching, she arose in haste and fled to her room. There, ambushed behind a window curtain, she saw Mr. Downing alight and shake hands with Ruggles, and heard him say: "To-night, then, at eight." From which she gathered that Ruggles was to dine with them.

As her father entered, Ruth went forward rather shyly to meet him.

"Hello, Toodles," said he, and caught her flushed face in his hands and kissed her heartily, to the poignant envy of one or two beflanneled youths who were loitering about. "Think we were never coming?"

"What took you so long?" Ruth asked. "Tire down, or can't that big box get over the road?"

"No. We took it easy o' purpose. Been having a long business talk. Good man, Ruggles. Got a clear, steady head on his shoulders. Should n't wonder if we managed to do some big business together. He's got the right spirit — the sort of spirit I've always tried to infuse our people with. He impressed me a lot."

Ruth's heavy lashes half hid her sapphire eyes.

"Did n't you talk about anything but business?" she demanded.

"Well, no — not that I remember — why?"

"Oh — nothing." She turned her shoulder to

him, then looked back resentfully. "I only thought, though, that as he saved me from drowning last night, you might have — have —"

Mr. Downing laughed. "Jealous, hey?" said he. His face grew suddenly grave. "My dear little daughter," said he, "now that you're safe, I don't want to think about that any more than I can help. It's too awful! God!"

He turned away suddenly and strode to the stairs.

Ruggles dined that night with the Downings at the Hermitage. No "shop" was talked during the meal, but Dick drew Ruggles out on his Turkish experiences, listening with the most intense interest to his brief but graphic descriptions, which were, like all of Ruggles's anecdotes, as impersonal as one can conceive possible. That native modesty, which had been a drawback in active commercial life, was now an unconscious asset in a social one. It drew to Ruggles people whom he could never possibly have known had he been self-satisfied.

Mr. Downing spoke but seldom. He confined himself to watching Ruggles and weighing him; and despite his first strongly favorable impressions, he was surprised at his gradually growing conviction that he had fallen far short in his estimate of his youthful guest. As an industrial power, Richard P. Downing had gained the greatest part of his success by a genius for the selection of the right men for the right places, and as he watched and

listened he began to think that there must have been a flaw in some part of his organization to have made possible the overlooking of Ruggles.

As for Ruth, she scarcely opened her lips. Ruggles observed this reticence and put his own construction upon it. He decided that the thought of Roxana still weighed on the girl's mind. That problem, thought Ruggles sadly to himself, should have been settled between them before all these other things had happened. It was there like a broken stitch — in a shoe-sole or anything else. He did not blame Ruth, nor could he blame himself. It seemed to be just one of those kinks in the same fate which had raised him from poverty to opulence, only to mock him in the end. Very young people always look for this sort of mockery when things go wrong and the dream is not carried to fruition — and at once.

Ruth, on her part, was not thinking at all about Roxana. She had dismissed that primitive from her mind as easily as one might forget the unpleasant sensations of being clawed by a Persian cat. What puzzled and vexed Ruth was the fact that Ruggles and her father had ridden back to Le Touquet in half an hour more than the time required to make the journey and appeared to have talked about nothing else but shoes. She began to wonder if perhaps Ruggles's long devotion to herself might not be less on account of her modest attractions than because she happened to be the daughter of

Richard Prouty Downing, president of the Walk-easy Shoe Company of America.

So Ruth retired early to stretch herself in bed and ponder these problems, and after she had gone, the men went into the *salon-couloir* and talked "shop." Dick became an immediate and violent partisan of Ruggles's big idea. Wonderful thought! — the sun never setting on the Walkeasy shoe. Our slogan: "We shoe the World"; and cuts of the globe with the latest model of the Walkeasy poised on the Pole! Carry the war into the enemies' countries! Big stores to be established in every town of every country where the people don't still go barefoot! Palaces — real shoe palaces — in the capitals, with tea-rooms and reading-rooms, and everybody wearing a Walkeasy shoe a welcome guest, whether they want to buy any more or not. Cash Walkeasy patron's check on any old bank in Hog Run or Turkey Trot, and no questions asked. Help 'em in trouble. Establish a Walkeasy cable code and engineer presentations to the Pope or the Sultan or the last man to fly upside down. Give 'em any d——d thing they want so long as they wear the badge of the guild on their feet. Bully big thought!

Ruggles finally said good night and walked back to his villa in a peculiar state of mind. It was, perhaps, more difficult for him to adjust himself to this newly sprung intimacy with the Downings,

father and son, than it had been for him to think of himself as a millionaire with great responsibilities or even as a suitor for the hand of Ruth. Here he had been actually in conference over the future development of the company with its supreme head and his probable successor, and outlining an ambitious policy constructed along bigger lines than either had ever ventured to imagine.

The strangest feature to Ruggles was that it had all seemed such a natural thing for him to do. The personal equations, too, impressed him as so different from anything which he could possibly have preconceived. Mr. Downing, that omnipotent Jove, had suddenly become to him merely a quiet, clear-headed business man, of which sort there were many thousands, whereas Dick, that wondrous paladin of college and factory, whom he had worshiped as a demigod, was, after all, no more than a fine, big, good-natured boy with a normal amount of commercial ability and the faculty of making friends.

It cannot be said that Ruggles was disappointed or disillusioned. He was more perplexed with himself to find that he could sit unabashed at the table of the high gods than critical of the Downing men. They were, after all, just about as he had pictured them. It was the utter lack of his own early reverence and awe which puzzled him, for he could not realize that the change was in himself.

The Downings decided to prolong their stay at

Le Touquet, and Ruggles scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry. He and Ruth were clogged in a sargasso sea of misunderstanding.

Ruth could not have told just when she had given her heart to Ruggles, but she knew when she had presented him with the deed to it. That was when, at the approach of the gig from the Réveuse, he had loosed his hold of the crate and drawn her to him, and she had returned in full measure his briny kisses.

And now she was hurt and puzzled at his apparent *volte-face* from the position of strong and ardent lover, pleading his cause and demanding his right and compelling it, to what appeared an all-absorbing interest in controlling the shoe market of the world. Ruth could not understand. Had he forgotten what had happened between them out there in the swirling eddies, with death staring them in the face?

When at Boulogne Ruggles had asked her father to return to Le Touquet with him in his car, Ruth had been sure in her heart that his plea for a business interview had been merely a pretext to ask for her hand in marriage; and to be told by her parent on his arrival that the two had discussed nothing beyond a scheme for the promotion of the interests of the company had been a shock to her pride as well as to her heart.

The affair was in this unfortunate condition when Ruggles went out late one afternoon for a

stroll down to the beach. The weather was chill and misty, and on such days his ankle was apt to become stiff and sore; so he headed for the dunes that flanked the beach, intending to rest for a few minutes on the top of one of them before starting back. Wherefore, selecting a dune that seemed to him to be well removed from the beat of possible sentimental strollers, he attacked it by the flank, clambered to the top, and nearly trod on Ruth, who was nestled in the sparse sedge and staring out across the leaden waste of water.

Ruth roused herself with a start and stared up at him almost angrily. Ruggles, who did not lack in powers of observation, saw that her violet eyes held traces of recent tears.

"How did you know that I was here?" she demanded frostily.

"I did n't," Ruggles answered, leaning on his stick and looking down at her. "What are you doing here all by yourself?"

"I felt like being alone for a while," she answered. "No doubt you came here for the same reason. Well, then, I 'll go —"

"Sit still," said Ruggles. "I thought a minute ago that I wanted to be alone, but now I know that that was n't what brought me here. I don't believe in accidents any more. I used to think that life was just a lot of accidents strung out one after the other, and that, after all, it was principally chance that had the most to do with it, and that all we

needed was to keep right on the job and profit by our chance when it came along." He paused.

"It seems to me that is precisely what you've done," said Ruth.

Ruggles nodded. "Yes," he answered, "that's true enough. But I've come to have a different idea about what makes the chance itself. I guess I got it from talking with Hamid Pasha. I believe now that there's some reason back of these chances — some divine purpose, as you might say. Just think how I worked for the Walkeasy Company and my father before me. Neither of us ever got much out of it, and then the company turned me down and I went out to Turkey and all that happened there you know. Then, afterwards, the chance was given me to save the life of the daughter of the company's president; a man that had always seemed to me like a sort of king."

"And you did it, and that gave you the chance to get back into the company again, but as a high official," said Ruth. "Perhaps you're right, Mr. Ruggles. It does look rather like predestination."

"It certainly does," Ruggles answered, "but that ain't all. Now maybe you won't like what I'm going to say, but I want to say it, anyhow. When we were being swept out there into the Channel by the tide, lying across that crate, the feeling came over me that it was more than blind chance that had drifted you and me together. It seemed as if

God had given me you, Mr. Downing's daughter, as a sort of reward for the faithful service of two generations. I felt that you were mine — just had to be mine — and that you were the girl I'd been waiting for. That's the reason I kissed you and held you close to me. It seemed right and natural. You may believe me or not, Miss Downing, but I could n't have felt that more if I'd been in love with you for years and years. As a matter of fact, I guess I have been."

Ruggles's voice had sunk in pitch and his breath was coming quickly. Ruth, her shoulder turned to him, was trying to control her emotion enough to speak. It was growing darker, for the long days were past and the approaching fog had blotted out the light in the western sky. Then suddenly a great gleam of light swept above their heads, glared for a moment against the wreaths of mist, and vanished.

"I saw that the other night, just before the crate drifted down to us," said Ruggles. "I might not have noticed the crate if it had n't been for Le Touquet light. The next day I went to see the keeper."

Again the pale shaft swung above their heads. Ruggles, turning to watch its passage, threw his weight upon his lame ankle, and gave a little gasp of pain. Ruth, turning, saw the expression of his face and divined its cause.

"You must sit down," said she gently.

"Then you sit down, too," he answered, "because there's some more I want to tell you, if — if you'll let me."

Ruth hesitated for an instant, then sank back to the glistening sedge. Ruggles flung himself down at her side.

"After we got picked up," said Ruggles, "I got to thinking that maybe I had n't acted right to have taken advantage of you like I did. It was n't as if things had been the way they were before Roxana tried to strangle you that night. Miss Challand told me what she said to you about herself and me, and she was n't sure whether you believed it or not. Did you?"

His clear eyes looked steadfastly into hers. Ruth did not shrink from his gaze. She shook her head slowly.

"No," she answered. "I never believed for a moment what she told me. It was too awful. I felt all the time that she was lying — and she saw it, and it made her furious. I don't think that she knew what she was doing. But I could n't help but think that there must have been something —" Her voice faltered.

"Ruth," said Ruggles slowly, "will you believe me now if I tell you on my honor that there was never one single thing between Roxana and me that might not have been said or done before anybody, so far as my part of it was concerned?"

Ruth nodded. "Yes," she answered, rather

RUGGLES AND RUTH

faintly. "I would believe anything that you told me."

"Well, then," said Ruggles, "I tell you now. I never trusted Roxana from the start, and I went out to Constantinople to keep a friend of mine from ruining his life by marrying her. As her guardian, I never had any more to do with her than I could possibly help. I guess that that was what made her so jealous, because she'd found out that she could do what she liked with most men when it came to making them crazy about her. She was just a wild, crazy slave-woman, and she could n't stand the idea of another woman being more admired than herself."

Ruth nodded.

"Then don't let's talk about her any more," said Ruggles. "Let's try to forget all about her. Now I want you to tell me something. When we were out there the other night" — he waved his arm toward the misty Channel — "and thought that we might drown — and I told you what I did — and you — you said that it was true" — his voice lowered in pitch, but his clear eyes looked deeply into hers — "did all that mean the same to you that it did to me? Did you realize all that it meant — and that it was something more than what might happen to a man and a woman who expected to drown in each others' arms and were clinging together for sympathy and courage? Tell me, Ruth —"

Ruth raised her glowing face to his. "What more can I tell you now than I told you then?" she asked. "You told me out there in the fog that I was to be yours if we were saved — or if we drowned. What did I answer you? Do you think that I would care to die with a lie on my lips? And if I lived — if we both lived — do you think that I would care for you less after we had faced death together and I had found you strong and brave — and tender?" Her voice choked. "Oh, my dear — you've acted as though you wanted to break my heart! Could n't you feel me loving you?"

Ruggles saw her dimly. His strong arms clasped her close and drew her to him, and high above the fair head and the dark one a brightening shaft of light passed once and twice and thrice as though in benediction.

THE END

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